Elder Paisios

of Mount Athos

by Hieromonk Isaac

Holy Monastery
Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian

Elder Paisios
of Mount Athos

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Elder Paisios of Mount Athos

by Hieromonk Isaac

Translated by

Hieromonk Alexis (Trader) PhD, and Fr Peter Heers

Edited by

Hieromonk Alexis (Trader) PhD,

Fr Evdokimos (Goranitis) and Philip Navarro

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"Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian"

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Elder Paisios of Mount Athos

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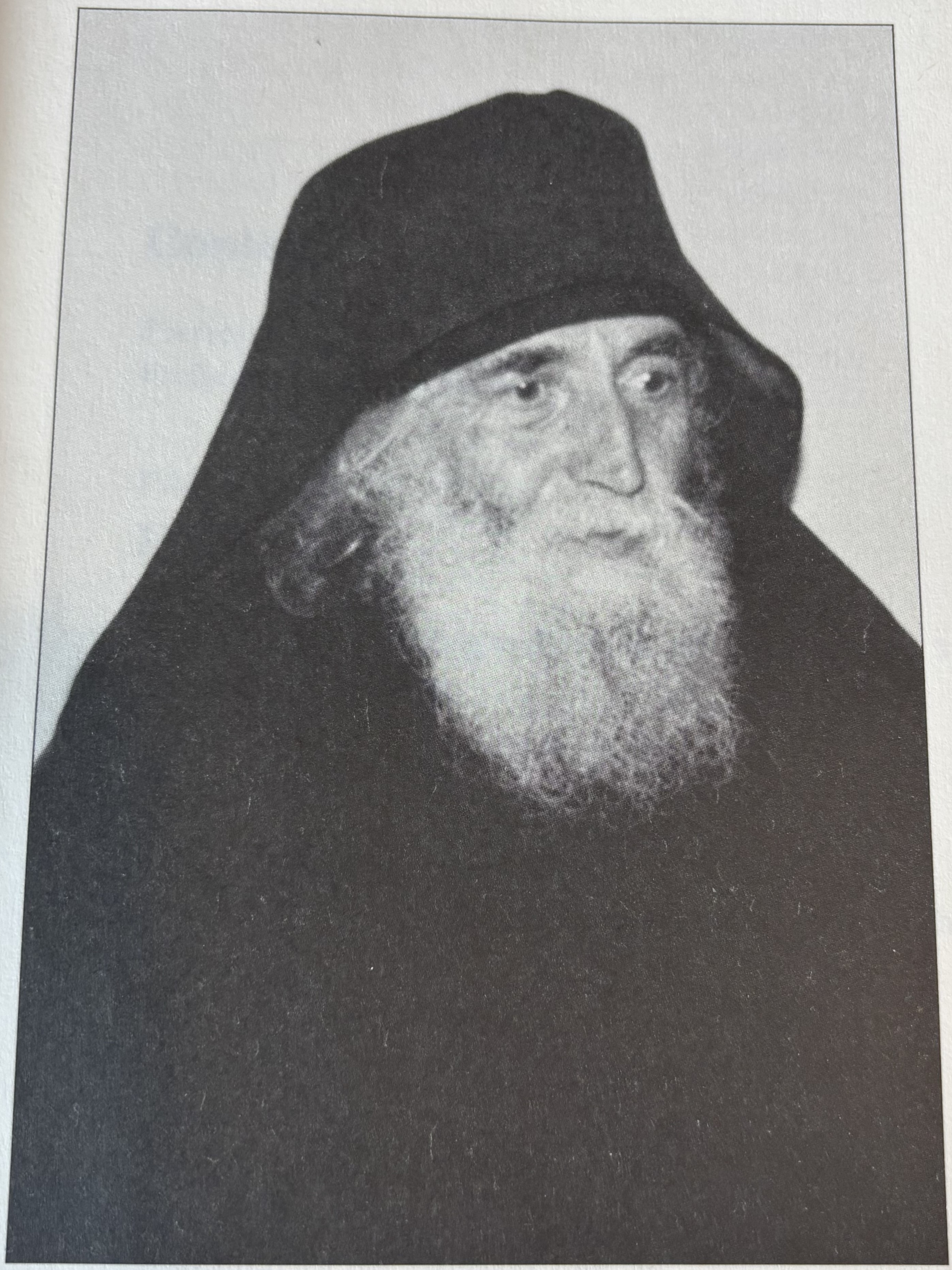

Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, Greece
1924-1994

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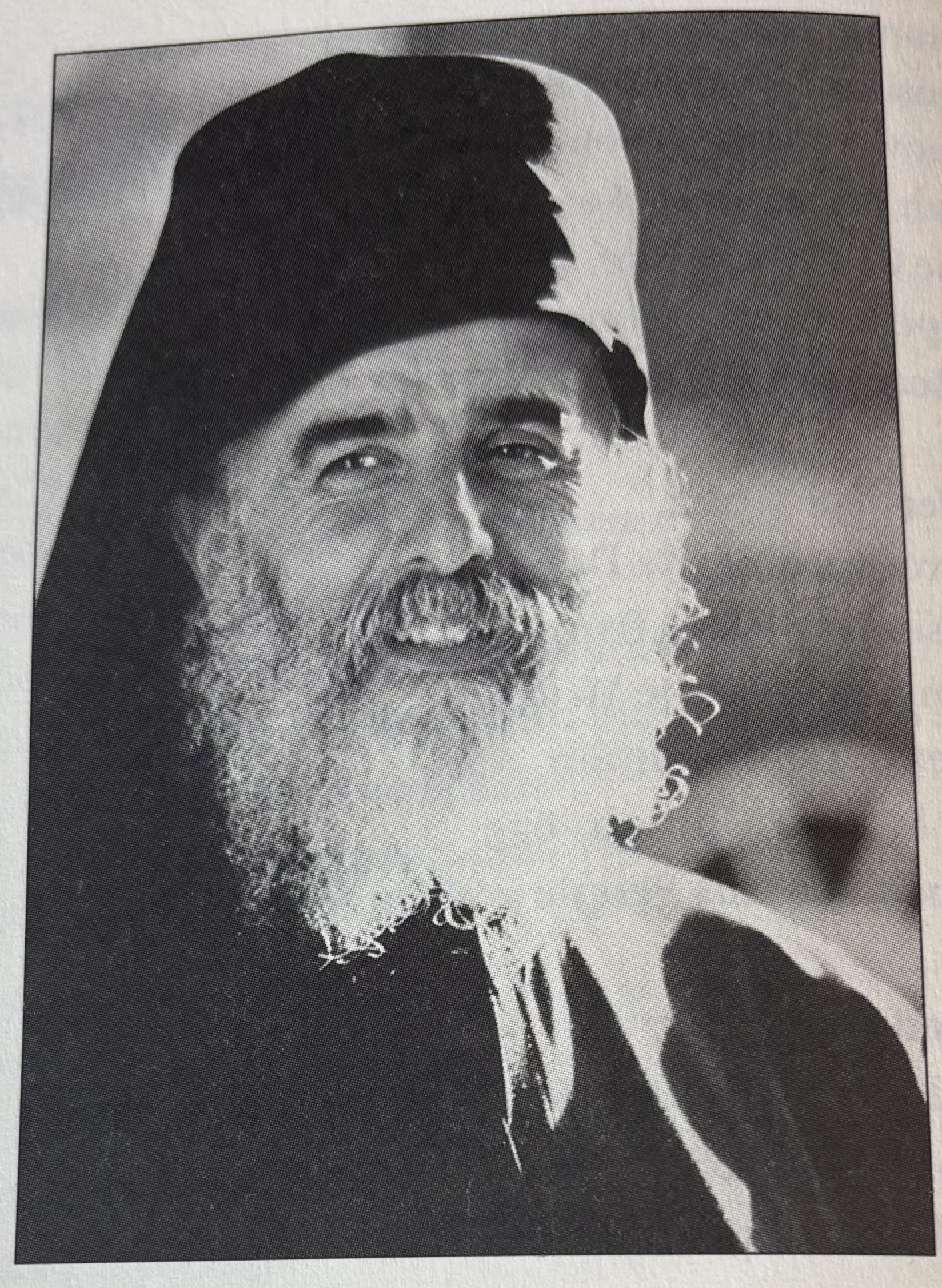

Hieromonk Isaac (Atallah)
1937-1998

Preface

Many are those in our day who have gone out in search of the experience, spiritual power and gifts read about in the Acts of the Apostles. They have gone out in search of the power of the Holy Spirit precisely because they lacked it, saw it nowhere around them and even believed it to have disappeared from the face of the earth.

Many others ring the incessant bell of "renewal," speak with enthusiasm of "revival" or "revitalization," and search for the road of "return to the Holy Fathers." In this very desire for renewal and return to that which has been lost, they thus confess the gap that exists between their experience and that which is described in the Acts of the Apostles or the lives of the early Church fathers.

Then there is that portion of secularized Christianity which sees a need for *"aggiornamento,"* or "bringing the Church up to date," or for *"semper reformando,"* or constant reform. In this search for a part of paradise which has been lost, it is apparent that the timelessness of the Kingdom, the diachronic presence of the Holy Spirit, the living Tradition of the Living God has been forfeited for the purely human, purely temporal, which are always in need of correction and updating. In secularized Christianity the eternal life and grace of God once breathed into the soul of the Church has been lost and replaced by the precariousness and weakness of religion.

For the members of the Orthodox Church, sinful and weak though they be, such searching is not necessary. For,

the experience and spiritual authority of the Holy Apostles continues to been seen, felt and lived by those successors *in practice* of the Holy Apostles, the charismatic elders of Orthodox monasticism. Orthodox Christians do not need to renew a dead Tradition or return to Holy Fathers long forgotten precisely because the Holy Tradition remains alive today in contemporary Holy Fathers, every bit as much bearers – both in word and in deed – of the "faith once delivered" to the Holy Apostles (Jud. 1:3). The "word" of these Holy Fathers is always "up to date" and relevant. Their teachings are never in need of reform precisely because, living in the "day of salvation," their teaching flows from the permanence of eternity.

The book which you hold in your hands, dear reader, is the authoritative biography of one of the Orthodox Church's most recent successors of the holy apostles, most recent flowerings of the All-Powerful Holy Spirit, one of the last links in the Golden chain of God-bearing Elders. In the pages of this biography, the door is open wide before you to enter into the timeless realm of Godliness, the eighth day of salvation, which has been made manifest in our own time, in our own day.

The life of Elder Paisios of Mount Athos resembles a garden adorned with countless flowers in bloom, radiant and colorful, beautiful to the eyes of man's spiritual heart, emitting an otherworldly aroma of holiness. The reader is invited to enter into his life and words, to "lay aside all earthly cares," to see life from the divine perspective, to understand the mystery of the Gospel by standing under, by submitting and entrusting oneself to, the experience and wisdom of this God-bearing Holy Father.

Those readers who are not yet well-acquainted with the spiritual life lived by the monks of the Holy Mountain*, even those readers who are members of the Orthodox Church, may be surprised and challenged by some of the miraculous events and marvellous counsels contained in this book. Let this challenge not be an insurmountable obstacle. See it as an opportunity for self-examination, a test of our trust and faith, and not as an excuse for our spiritual deficiency or infirmity. Let us not stand in judgment of the saints, but let us be edified and humbled.

Although this book contains a record of miracles and divine interventions, that which is most miraculous and worthy of awe are the Elder's spiritual virtues. His humility, his obedience, his trust in God and immense love of God and neighbor, and his discernment – these are the foundation upon which God then worked His wonders. The acquisition of these virtues is the aim of every Christian and thus becomes apparent the immense value of this biography.

Because the life of the Holy Spirit exceeds the limits of rational analysis – and the life of those holy ones who were filled with the Holy Spirit likewise – it is necessary for us, who are weighed down by passions and often confined within the limits of human logic, to see the reading of such lives of saints as opportunities to begin to live "by the faith of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16). As we crucify our intellect, which means not trusting ourselves but Christ and His saints, we will no longer live ourselves, within our limited vision, but Christ will live within us (Gal. 2:20). And with Christ living and guiding us from within, the divine

* See Glossary p. 693 for an explanation of the term.

perspective opens up before us.

The life of Elder Paisios, as with the lives of all the saints, just like the Gospel itself, offers the pious faithful the opportunity to "acquire the mind of Christ" and thus "live by the faith of the Son of God who loves us and gave Himself for us" (Gal 2:20).

Fr. Peter Alban Heers
Petrokerasa, Greece
The Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ
August 6, 2011

Preface to the Greek Edition

Many edifying works have been written concerning the ever-memorable Elder Paisios and have succeeded in making him better known. What has been published so far, however, has primarily described his teachings and miracles with few, if any, biographical details. The elder of our brotherhood, Hieromonk Isaac, a spiritual child of Elder Paisios, recognized the need for a thorough biography of the elder and endeavored to compose one. He began writing, with the help of the brotherhood, roughly two years after Father Paisios's repose on June 12, 1994. Had it not been for his own repose, on July 3, 1998, the biography, then nearly finished, would have been published shortly thereafter.

But the book was still in need of corrections and additions, and given the difficulties that we faced after being orphaned by the loss of our elder such a task was frankly impossible. And so the biography was left untouched for more than three years.

Our elder's desire to see the biography published and the work he had put into it, along with the urging of the brethren, ultimately compelled us to complete the book. Still, there were times when we became discouraged and considered abandoning this task, for we knew how ill-suited we were to such a difficult and important endeavor. We were overwhelmed with fear that we would misrepresent the life

of the elder and that, instead of benefiting people, we would cause offense and spiritual harm. We felt like little children, trying to speak about something so great that it transcended our ability to find adequate words to express ourselves and to describe the Elder.

While Father Paisios was alive, neither we nor our elder thought to record or keep notes of our discussions with him, to photograph him, or to collect information from him with the aim of writing a biography. His presence fully satisfied us: it was enough for us just to see him and hear him. Perhaps some will consider this a failure on our part, but our consciences are at peace, for we know that we did nothing that might have upset him.

The only resources at our disposal, therefore, were a few notes that we had taken regarding the elder's answers to our personal questions about everyday spiritual struggles. In these are recorded examples the elder gave of his own spiritual contests, of supranatural events as well as of demonic traps and temptations. For the most part, we based the text on our recollections of the elder's comments, many of which we had heard more than once. His words, which we had hidden in—or rather, written on—our hearts, we have now transferred onto paper for the benefit of our brethren.

Upon learning of our efforts, many clergy and laity who knew the elder placed at our disposal material of great value—letters by the elder, cassettes, photographs, notes, and testimonies—some on their own initiative and others upon being asked.

This material shed much light on the elder's life and filled in many gaps. We approached these sources of information

responsibly and with great care, sifting through and carefully selecting only what was trustworthy and reliable. In fact, some of the material was simply unrealistic, or misrepresented the elder's spirit. Other texts, out of an undiscerning reverence, stretched the truth or overemphasized one aspect or another of his life. And some submissions distorted the elder's words, having been written by people who hadn't understood them. Finally, there were a few people who spoke disparagingly of the elder, most likely out of ignorance rather than malice. May God not hold it against them.

In attempting to record the elder's life, we have made the truth our guide: "The beginning of Thy words is truth."[1] That is to say, we attempted to present the elder as we experienced him, as he was, without exaggeration or idealization proceeding from our love and admiration.

A large part of this work is essentially autobiographical, since the elder himself was the main source of our information. Many of the narratives proceed directly from his profoundly trustworthy lips. Nevertheless, everything that we present here is abbreviated, impoverished, and feeble, in no way exhausting his spiritual riches.

Indeed, not only do we not exaggerate the elder's grandeur, but, without wanting to, we actually do him an injustice. This is because the inner life of the elder, like that

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1. Ps. 118:160 (119:160). [Quotations from the Psalter are taken from *The Psalter According to the Seventy*. The traditional Orthodox verse-numbering, that of the Septuagint, is given first. This is followed by the verse-numbering used in standard western translations of Scripture, that of the Masoretic (that is, Hebrew) text. It should be noted that the differences between the Septuagint text, which is the text of the Church, and the Masoretic text concern more than the numbering of verses: sometimes there are important differences in meaning. —eds.]

of all of the saints, was hidden and unobservable. He revealed but a portion of this life, for our benefit, but the greater part he kept hidden. In our interactions with his human qualities stood out, veiling his spiritual majesty. Most basic, though, is the fact that our insufficiency and spiritual blindness obstructed our ability to see the elder in a more spiritual way, preventing us from portraying him to you more accurately. Were we in a better spiritual condition, this biography would be much finer. For, as is well known, to write the life of a saint, the author should himself be a saint and, indeed, to the same extent and in the same spiritual state as the subject. The elder described saints' lives that had been written by other saints as astounding.

Since "the well is deep and we have nothing to draw with"[2]—that is, because our own powers are insufficient to approach and present the elder's spiritual greatness—we have consequently limited ourselves to a simple and faithful reporting of facts and events. We have tried to be trustworthy witnesses and nothing more.

In spite of this, even in our clumsy text, one can see the elder moving comfortably between heaven and earth; mocking, though also pitying, the devil; and interacting with a constellation of saints. He is revealed in total poverty, while possessing blessings of the richest kind, which he pulled from heaven to earth by his prayer. He was weak and sick, yet all-powerful and radiant with the grace of God, before Whom even the laws of nature retreat. As a monk he was a citizen of the desert, yet he was still quite close to the needs of the people. He was an ascetic, strict with himself, but charitable

2. John 4:11.

to the point of self-sacrifice on behalf of the weak, the sick, the suffering, and the oppressed.

It was impossible to include all of the details of his life in one volume, and so we have selected the most significant and instructive ones. The full teaching of the Elder, which fills several volumes; the bulk of his letters; and more than two hundred of his documented miracles have been omitted. Our goal was not to present a catalogue of miracles. It is natural that miracles would take place, that the gifts of grace would operate in someone who had arrived at the summit of the virtues and had acquired divine grace. The question is how he arrived there, what path led him there, and how he warred against temptations and the passions. What left a lasting impression on us, more than his miracles, were his great self-denial, his magnanimous struggles for the love of Christ, his monastic strictness with himself, his refined awareness of the spiritual life, his rare discernment, his sacrificial love for every person, and his patristic outlook, which bestowed peace upon all.

The book has been divided into two parts. In the first part, "His Life", we have attempted to present, in the clearest and most complete manner, the elder's journey of spiritual struggle from his birth until his repose. In fourteen chapters, divided according to the different places the elder lived, radiant details of his life shine forth, including his ascetic struggles, diverse activities, and miracles.

The second part of the book, "Themes", we judged necessary as a supplement to and explanation of the first part, so that the reader might draw nearer to the elder and become able to understand him more fully. It does not pro-

ceed chronologically as does the first part, but contains biographical material arranged according to subject. Though each part can be considered independent and self-sufficient—each could have been published separately—they also enjoy a profound internal unity.

The central theme of this latter part of the book is the grace of God. In order for the elder to acquire divine grace, he first wrestled with the passions and sin. After acquiring it, he was shown to be a "good steward of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pt. 4:10). Thus, we have divided the second part into the chapters "Virtues", "Spiritual Gifts", and "Offerings".[3]

In "Virtues", incidents from the elder's life are related simply and straightforwardly. These incidents are arranged by sections, each section treating a particular virtue. The elder's teaching is not discussed at length, except where necessary in order to convey the elder's spirit accurately.

In the next chapter, "Spiritual Gifts", descriptions of the elder's varied and supranatural gifts are arranged by type,

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3. This division was based on a biblical passage referring to Saint John the Baptist (Luke 1:15–16). "For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord," it begins, "and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink"—which refers to his ascesis, which is the struggle for *Virtues*. Then follow the words "and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb," which describe the *Gifts of Grace* with which the Prophet was blessed. The passage then concludes, "many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God"—which is a description of how his life will be an *Offering* to others. (The Great Forerunner, of course, went through these stages in a different order than the elder, in that he was shown to be a prophet even from his mother's womb. In general, the saints first struggled to be cleansed from the passions by observing the commandments, and from this the virtues were born in them. Next, they received divine grace. Then, in a third stage, they lived while bestowing gifts of grace on others for the sake of their salvation.)

illuminated by the elder's and others' testimonies. Only a few were selected, by way of example, and we have not included commentary except when further explanation seemed needful.

"Offerings", the final chapter, cannot do justice to the magnitude, value, and extent of the elder's offerings to his fellow man, which are impossible to assess in the space of a few pages. We present only a few special cases in which his assistance was especially helpful. Possessing a tremendous variety of divine gifts—naturally, without constraining others, without reliance on human effort or human intentions—the elder extended the riches of divine grace to starving souls.

In order to avoid inaccuracies and errors of any kind, we submitted this text to the judgment and correction of Elder Paisios's spiritual children and of other fathers.

We owe much gratitude, which we wish to acknowledge, to the following:

To our spiritual brothers, those who reviewed, corrected, and supplemented this *Life*. Their wholehearted counsel was essential, for without their assistance this book would be quite incomplete and full of errors.

To yet other collaborators who entrusted us with diverse materials; and to those who proofread the text and made suggestions and corrections, devoting ample time and effort until this work took its final form.

And, finally, to all who contributed in whatsoever ways, apparent or unseen, to this book, so polished in appearance—working with us so that, ten years after the repose of Elder Paisios, the book might at last see the light of publication.

In particular, we want to thank our venerable Elder Gregory—who was tonsured by Elder Paisios—who is also the spiritual father of the Monastery of Saint John the Forerunner in Metamorphosis, Chalkidiki, for his wide-ranging support during this entire process, including his willingness to assume the costs of the publication of the Greek edition.

Upon all we entreat the grace of God and the prayers of Elder Paisios.

We have deemed it appropriate to add the following remarks in order to aid the reader:

First, many actions, struggles, and events can be properly understood only within their context. Therefore, the elder's words should not be indiscriminately generalized. Some were offered in the context of a particular case and are not valid for everyone. "A medicine that helps one person might harm another."[4]

Second, some of the elder's positions on ecclesiastical, national, monastic, and other issues are presented. The elder's positions, which he intended to make plain to others, were dispassionate and spiritual, and we portray what he said without the slightest intention of affronting others or calling attention to anyone in particular.

Thirdly, the testimonies you will read have been recorded just as they were received. Some, which were quite long, have been shortened, though without any distortion or alteration. In all cases, we have respected the desires of those who submitted testimonies but wished to remain anonymous.

Finally, all dates referred to in the book are according to

4. This is a Greek saying.—eds.

the Julian, or "Old," Calendar. Wherever a New Calendar date appears, it is identified as such.

In closing this preface, we find ourselves unable to worthily express our gratitude and thanks to the elder for everything that he offered us. We can only ask from the depths of our hearts that he forgive us for any sin against his love, and especially for our boldness in publishing his *Life*. Nonetheless, we entreat him to enlighten the minds of the readers, such that, understanding correctly everything that is written, they will be spiritually edified.

Being aware of our imperfections, shortcomings, and errors, we are grateful to receive any observations and suggestions proceeding from love for the truth. If by chance readers should encounter errors in this record of the elder's struggles, let it be known that they are not by any means the fault of Elder Paisios or his biographer, Papa-Isaac, but rather of those who have edited and published the final text.

If, on the other hand, any soul should be enflamed by the elder's achievements, and take upon himself spiritual struggle, let him glorify the venerable name of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom is due glory and worship, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, unto the ages. Amen.

The Brotherhood of Elder Isaac
The Hermitage of the Resurrection
Kapsala, Karyes
The Holy Mountain of Athos

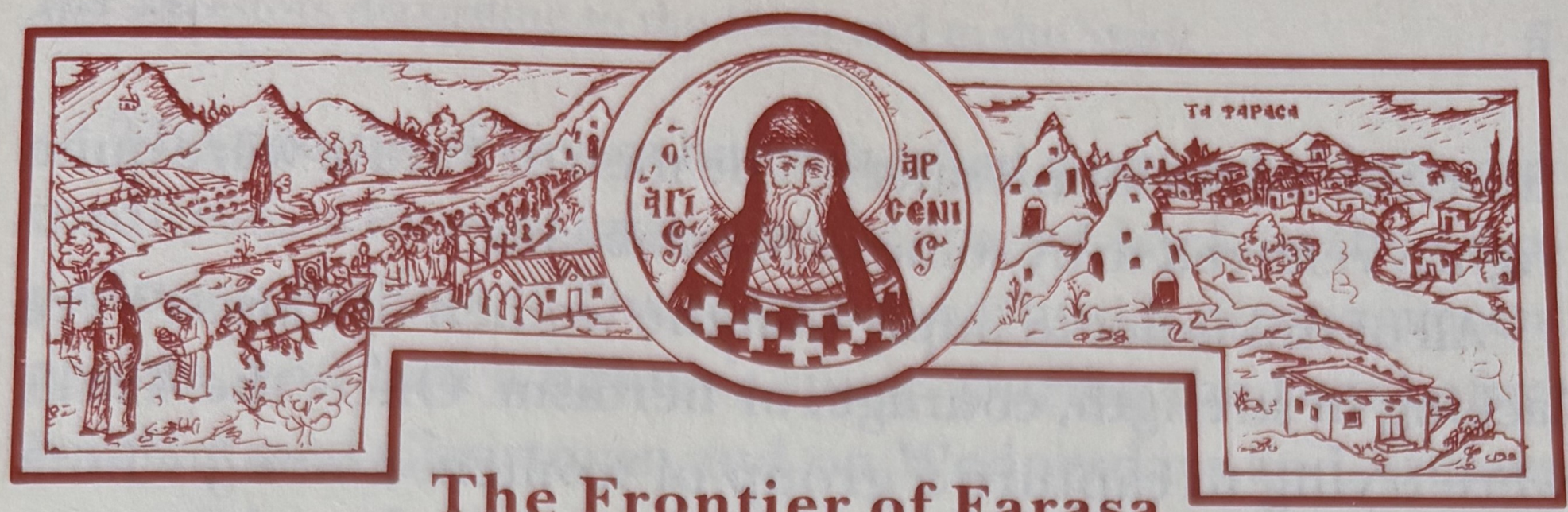
Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian.
Icon from the Holy Monastery "Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian", publisher of this book.

PART ONE

His Life

His Ancestors According to the Flesh and According to the Spirit

A contemporary view of Farasa



The Frontier of Farasa

Farasa or Varassio, located in Cappadocia, the homeland of Elder Paisios, was before 1924[5] a well-kept central village of frontier Romanity.[6] Farasa and the six villages surrounding it were located roughly two hundred kilometers south of Caesarea. In spite of their isolation in the depths of Asia Minor, the people had maintained unaltered their Orthodoxy, Greek identity, and language.[7] The men of Farasa were renowned for their manliness and courage. Thanks to their valor, the village was kept safe from the Tsetes – a lawless Turkish militia – and it had remained a free part of Romanity on the Cappadocian frontier, where many fleeing

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5. At a peace conference in 1923, an exchange of populations based on religion was agreed upon between Greece and the newly established Turkish Republic. As a consequence of this, the Orthodox inhabitants of Farasa and all the Asia Minor were forced to emigrate. – eds.

6. The term Romanity expresses the self identity of Orthodox Christians in the Eastern Roman Empire, where the Orthodox Faith, Greek language, Greek culture, Roman law predominated. The terms Byzantium and Byzantine, were invented by Hieronymus Wolf in 1557, and were unknown in the Roman Empire. The Turks used and still use the term Rum, meaning someone who belongs to the Eastern Roman Empire, in order to refer to their Greek-speaking subjects. A detail explanation can be found on the internet in the works of Fr. John Romanides and Anastasios Philippides. – eds.

7. Ottoman Turks used many barbarous techniques in order to forcefully convert Greek speaking Christians to Islam. Many Christians were given two choices: a. To become Muslims and keep their Greek language. b. To remain Christians, but stop speaking Greek, which literally meant cutting off their tongues. – eds.

from the Turks found safety. The men of Farasa were quite rightly referred to by some as Maccabeans.[8]

All of this is not to imply that the women of Farasa were lacking in strength, courage, or heroism. Once, the Turks were trying to capture a group of women, among whom were relatives of the Elder. Rather than end up being debased as a member of a Turk's harem—a common fate of women captives—they chose to plunge into a river, willing to drown in order to keep their faith and their honor.[9]

In Farasa there were fifty churches. Some of these were old monasteries that had at one time flourished. There were also many miraculous springs, known throughout Cappadocia for the wonders that God worked through them. The village's main church was named in honor of the martyrs Barachesius and Jonah, who, according to tradition, were martyred on that spot in the middle of the fourth century.[10]

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8. The Maccabeans were a Jewish priestly family that led the fight against Antiochus Epiphanes (175–164 BC). The name was applied to the people of the village because of their reputation as zealous warriors, fighters for faith and fatherland.

9. The Church recognizes acts such as that of the women in Farasa as being akin to accepting martyrdom for the faith. Indeed, several saints, such as Saint Martinian of Palestine and Saint Pelagia of Antioch, along with her mothers and sisters, acted to bring about their own deaths in order to maintain purity. Their actions have garnered the approval of ancient teachers of the faith, including Saint Ambrose (*De virginibus* 3.7, NPNF2, vol. 10, pp. 386–387) and Saint John Chrysostom (PG 50 579–584); as well as that of modern fathers such as Saint Nicholas Velimirovich (*Prologue,* Feb. 13). On pp. 109-111 of this volume "Confronting temptation as a martyr", a similar incident in the life of Elder Paisios is described. For further discussion of this matter, see Englehardt, The Foundations of Christian Bioethics (Swets and Zeitlinger Publishers: Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2000), pp. 328–329.—eds.

10. Saints Barachesius and Jonah are commemorated on March 29.—eds.

The people of Farasa had inherited a remarkable ascetic tradition, whose origins can be traced back to the Cappadocian Fathers.[11] They loved the Church, were reverent people, and had a fighter's spirit. During the fasts before Pascha* and Christmas, and on Wednesdays and Fridays, most of them fasted completely until the ninth hour (that is, three o'clock in the afternoon).

The last flicker – and most perfect expression – of this tradition was the village priest, Saint Arsenios.[12] Because of his holy life and many miracles, Christians and even Muslims flocked to him from all over Cappadocia.

His Family

Living in this blessed environment, the Elder's ancestors were distinguished by their exceptional reverence.

His grandmother, called Hadji-Christina,[13] had her own chapel that was dedicated to the Archangel Michael and located quite a distance from the village. Sometimes she would

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11. Saints Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and Gregory of Nyssa, bishops in Cappadocia in the fourth century, are collectively known to history as the Cappadocian Fathers. – eds.

12. Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian (1841–1924), is commemorated on November 10. His biography, *Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian,* was composed by Elder Paisios. (A listing of others of the Elder's works, and works recording his teachings, may be found in Appendix.) – eds.

13. Hadjis (or Chatzis, engl. pilgrim). A title or name given to those who made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and were "baptized" in the Jordan River. Such a pilgrim may assume the title of Hatzis for the rest of his or her life. This term may also be attached before the baptismal name to produce a variation such as Hatji-Giorgis or Hatji-Yiannis. Such names often become surnames, especially common among Greeks. – Trans.

stay there alone, living peacefully and quietly with prayer and fasting; during the winter, when they would be totally snowed-in, she used to find warm bread sitting unaccountably on the ledge of the chapel window. She would then pray and eat it. She also had a house at Adana, where she would host Saint Arsenios when he would make pilgrimages to the Holy Land on foot. His father, Prodromos Eznepidis, was a gifted administrator descended from a noble family of Farasa that had held positions of authority in the village for generations.[14] He served for decades as mayor. He was faithful, reverent, and particularly devoted to Saint Arsenios, whom he obeyed in all things.

Prodromos was a skilled craftsman, expert in many areas. Though working mostly as a farmer, he also had a forge where he cast iron goods. He was courageous, bold, and adventuresome. From his youth he explored untrodden areas of Farasa, climbing dangerous cliffs. At the age of sixteen he injured a lion and then wrestled with it. But he was first of all a great lover of his country, a brave fighter, an excellent rifleman, and an intrepid guardian of the border. Many times, he saved the village from the Tsetes. On one occasion, disguising himself as a Turkish woman, he went with some companions to one of their hideouts. Once there, he asked for their leader and, taking his weapon from him, chased them from the area. Often in danger, he was

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14. Their original family name was Hadjidigenis. Later, they were forced to take the name of the Elder's great-grandfather, who was named Theodosios. His father, therefore, was originally named Prodromos Theodosiou; however, when the Turks were hunting for him, he changed his name again, to Eznepidis, which means "foreigner."

even taken prisoner one time, but the prayers of Saint Arsenios protected him.

When he had to go to Adana on village business as mayor, and would present himself to Kemal Ataturk, the ruler would greet him with respect for his manliness and courage: "Greetings, valiant Romios!"[15] And when Greece opposed Italy in the Second World War, the elderly Prodromos, fired with youthful enthusiasm, wanted to volunteer to fight.

Prodromos was a just man, merciful and full of brotherly love. When in 1924 the inhabitants of Farasa were forced to relocate to the town of Konitsa, in northwestern Greece, the Greek government distributed land to them. Prodromos, now as mayor of Konitsa, saw first to the others, keeping only the worst, most unfertile plot of land for himself and his family. He would later have eye problems from the fires he had to light in his fields to clean up the ground and clear it of briars.

The Elder's mother was named Evlogia.[16] A descendent of the Frangopoulos family, she was related to Saint Arsenios. Prudent, bright, charming, industrious, and deeply reverent, she had frequent recourse to the counsel of the Saint. She had been married to Prodromos at the young age of fifteen.

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15. Kemal Ataturk (1881–1938) was the founder and first president of the modern state of Turkey. Ataturk addressed Prodromos as "Romios" (pronounced Rome-ee-os which means Roman) in consequence of his Eastern Roman heritage. Today the term Greek is used in the Western world to describe the descendants of the Greek speaking Eastern Romans. – eds.

16. In Konitsa she was referred to as Evlampia; but Elder Paisios said that she was in fact named Evlogia, and this is the name he wrote in his commemoration book.

These blessed souls, Prodromos and Evlogia, were given ten children. The first two, Catherine and Sotiria, died as infants. When Saint Arsenios baptized the third child, he told them to name her Zoe, which in Greek means "life," and from that point on all of the children lived. Their names, from oldest to youngest, were Zoe, Mary, Raphael, Amalia, Haralambos, Arsenios (who would become Elder Paisios), Christina, and Luke. Raphael is still living today.

The Elder* was born on July 25, 1924, on the feast of Saint Anna in the village of Farasa in Cappadocia, which has given birth to so many saints.

Baptized and Uprooted

When he was to be baptized, his parents wanted to name him Christos, after his grandfather. But Saint Arsenios said to his grandmother, "Ah, Hadji-Anna, I've baptized so many children for you! Won't you give one of them my name?" And, turning to his parents, he remarked, "It's right for you to want to leave a boy behind you to follow in his grandfather's footsteps, but don't I want to leave a monk behind to follow in mine?" And then he addressed the godmother, telling her, "Say, 'Arsenios.'"[17] And thus he gave the child his own name and his blessing, and prophesied that he would become a monk.[18]

In that same year, the population-exchange between Greece and Turkey took place, which uprooted Christians

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17. Arsenios's sponsor was Anastasia, the wife of Prodromos Kortsinoglou, who served as Saint Arsenios's chanter.

18. *Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian*, p. 87.

from Asia Minor.[19] Arsenios's family and the rest of the residents of Farasa, including Saint Arsenios, were forced to set off on the bitter road of the refugee.

On the ship, because of the tremendous crowd, someone stepped on the little baby (Arsenios), endangering his life, but God kept his chosen one alive, because he was intended to guide many souls into the Kingdom of Heaven. (The elder, humbly denying having any spiritual accomplishments in his life, once said of this, "If I had died then, I would have had the grace of baptism fresh. They would have thrown me into the sea for the fish to eat – at least then there would have been a happy fish, and I would have gone to paradise.")

The refugees stayed for a short while in Piraeus, the port near Athens. Afterward, they were brought to the old castle in Corfu. It was there in Corfu that Saint Arsenios reposed and was buried, in accordance with a prophecy he had once made: "I will live forty days in Greece and I will die on an island." They subsequently moved to a village in the area of Igoumenitsa and, finally, to Konitsa.

And so it was that the newly-illumined Arsenios, a forty-day old baby anonymous among crowds of refugees, was brought by his parents to mother Greece. Years afterward, he would become known throughout the world and would lead scores of people to the knowledge of God. From his very first days he knew mankind's pain and suffering, and later he

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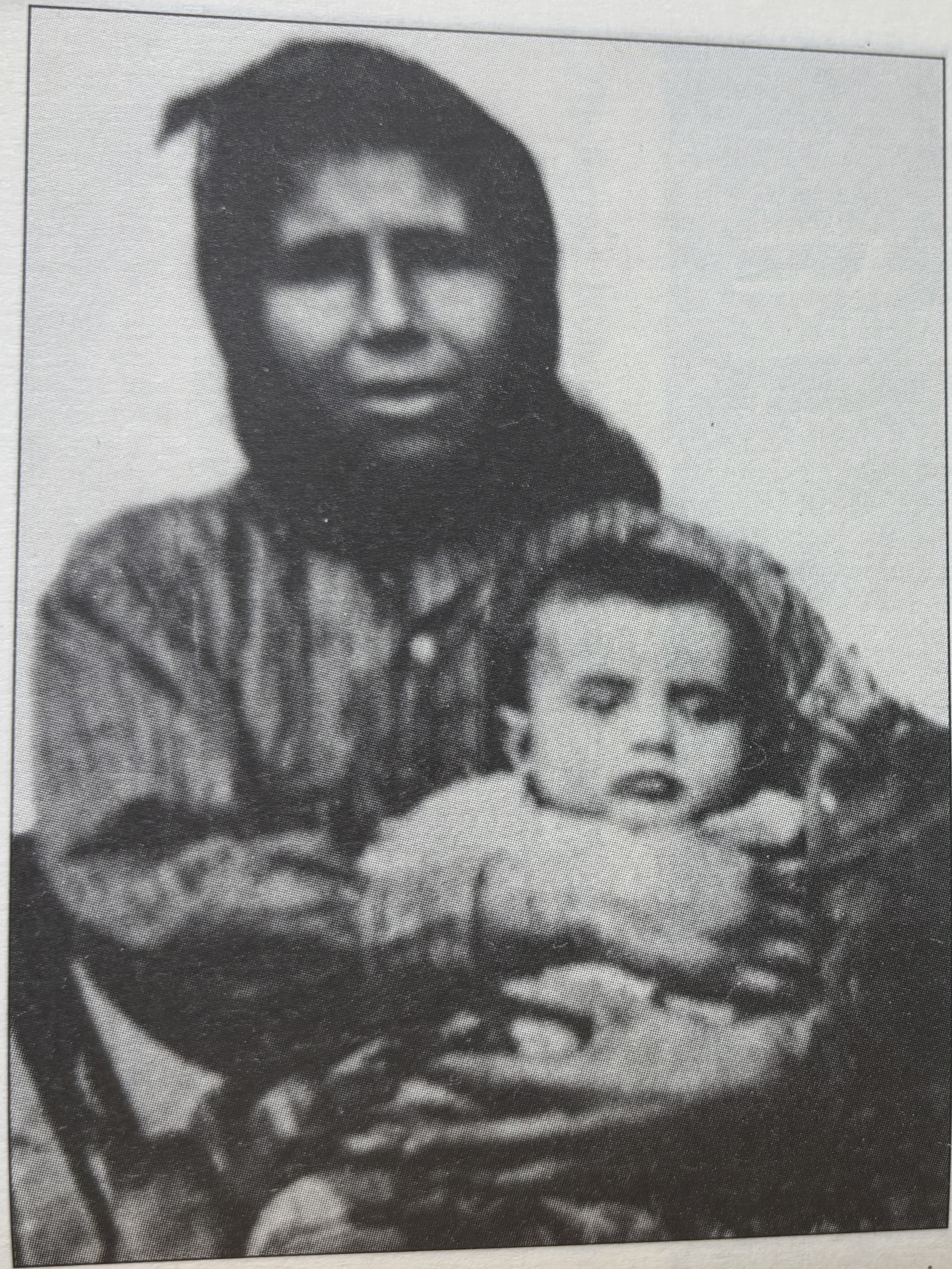
19. The villagers departed in unison approximately 4000 people and avoided concentration camps and death marches. For an eyewitness and victim's vivid description of the concentration camps and death marches see the book of Ilias Venezis, *To noumero 31328,* [The number 31328], Athens, Estia's Bookstore, 1999 in Greek, or *Nummmer 31328,* Mainz: Von Zabern,1969 in German. – eds.

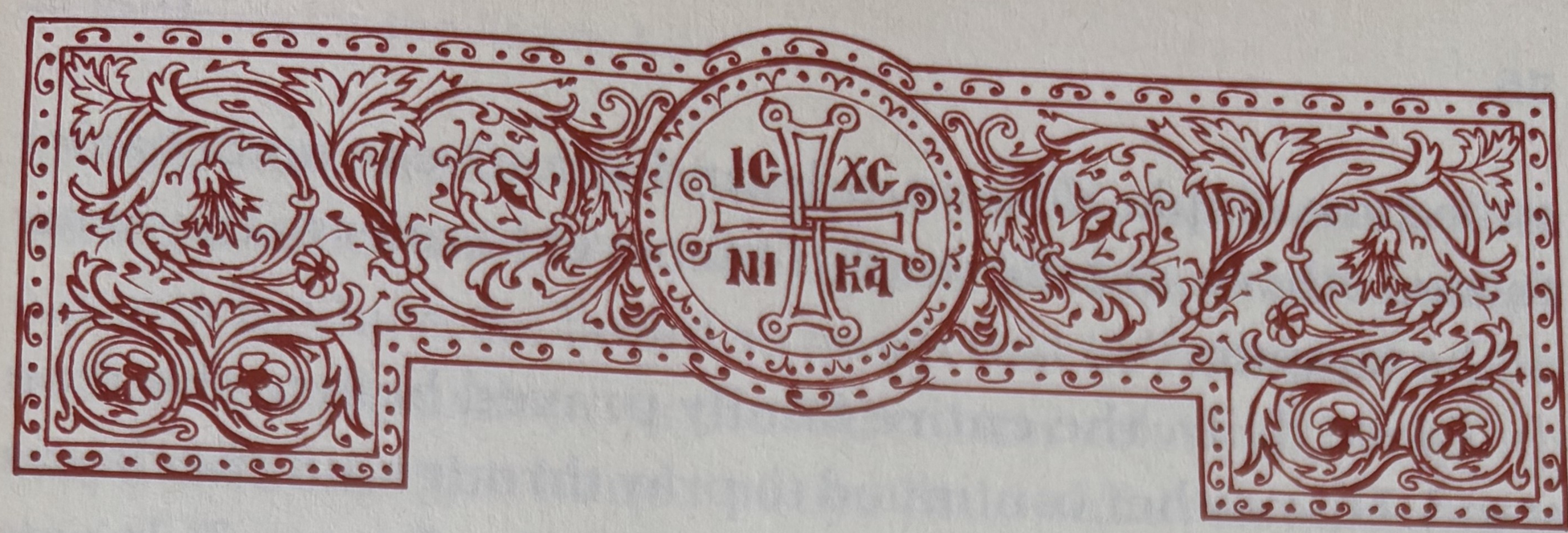
himself would become a harbor of consolation for thousands of tormented souls.

The former Holy Church of Saints Barachesius and Jonah at Farasa. It is here that elder Paisios was baptized by Saint Arsenios.

In Training for the Ascetic Life



The Elder as an infant in his mother's arms and his father.



An Upbringing in the Instruction and Admonition of the Lord

Blessed little Arsenios, together with his mother's milk, received from his parents an attitude of sincere reverence toward God. Instead of telling stories, fables, and fairy-tales, they spoke to him of the life and miracles of Saint Arsenios. And so he was nurtured with love and admiration for Hadjiefendis, as they called the Saint.[20] From childhood, he wanted to become a monk so he could be like his Saint.

After Saint Arsenios, the person who most beneficially influenced his life was his mother, toward whom he felt a special love and to whom he offered a great deal of help. It was from her that he learned humility: she counseled him not to want to beat the other children at their games and brag about it, and not to try to be the first in line, since being first or last was the same thing. She likewise taught him abstinence by instructing him not to eat before it was mealtime and she considered the violation of this rule akin to fornication, in that it showed a lack of self-control. She helped him

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20. People began to refer to the Saint as "Hadjiefendis" after his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The word is a compound derived from *hadji,* used because of the pilgrimage he had made, and the Greek word *afendis*, referring to a person in authority. – Trans.

to become simple, diligent, tidy, and attentive to his behavior toward others, and she taught him never to refer to the name of the tempter.[21]

Twice daily, the entire family prayed before the icon stand. His mother continued to pray throughout the day as she did her housework, saying the Jesus Prayer.[22] It was characteristic of his parents' reverent spirit that, when they went to work on the threshing floor (a work that would keep them away from home for days), they would bring with them antidoron*.[23]

Little Arsenios, bright and interested, easily absorbed all the good words he heard from his parents. He learned to fast, pray, and spend time in church. He was the most beloved of all of the children of the family. "On the one hand," the elder once remarked, "my father loved me because I was inclined to work with my hands and had some talent at it. My mother, on the other hand, loved me for the little bit of reverence I possessed."

Childhood Asceticism

Little Arsenios's zeal for fasting was exceptional. He fasted strictly from a very young age. He would ask his mother to boil greens without oil for him to eat. In order to continue

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21. That is, the devil.—eds.

22. The Jesus Prayer—in its simplest form "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me," or in its most extended form "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner"—is a mainstay of traditional Christian prayer. In Greece, it is sometimes referred to simply as "the prayer."—eds.

23. The asterix denotes that a term is included in the glossary. The asterix only apears in the first instance of each term.—eds.

fasting after the Divine Liturgy he would wait hours before eating antidoron. He would tighten his belt so he wouldn't eat much. Once, he fasted so much that he collapsed on his bed from exhaustion. As the Elder later related, "My hands were thin like the hands of the little children starving in Africa, because my body hadn't gotten basic nourishment at a young age. My neck was like a cherry stem – the other kids used to tell me my head was going to fall off."

Katie Patera, a reverent woman from Konitsa who was older than Arsenios, tells the following story: "I once asked him, 'Have you eaten anything today, my boy?'

'No,' he replied. 'What can I eat? My mother cooks the meat and the fasting food in the same pot. The pot soaks up the meat, and then it gets into the fasting food, so I can't eat from it.'

'But your mother's so clean and tidy, and she cleans the pot with lye!'[24]

'I can't eat from it,' he answered me. He fasted. He fasted all the time, and he would go off on his own to pray."

When he had learned to read, he found a copy of the Holy Scriptures and began to study the four Gospels each day. He also poured over the lives of the Saints. He had collected a box-full of these, and as soon as he would return home from school, not even wanting to eat, he would head straight for the box, take out a Saint's life, and begin reading. His older brother, though he was a reverent child as well, would nevertheless take the books and hide them, because he didn't want little Arsenios to spend too much time reading

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24. Lye; that is, water filtered through ashes, used in former times for cleaning clothes and housewares. – eds.

Church books and to neglect his lessons. Arsenios didn't complain—he just found other Saints' lives for his spiritual nourishment.

His brother's testimony was: "From second grade on, Arsenios read spiritual books, secluded himself, and prayed often. He didn't play like the other children."

He tried to put into practice everything that he read in the lives of the Saints. For example, he read that when a person is afraid of a particular place, he should go there until his fear is driven away.[25] And so, because he would get scared when he would walk past the cemetery, he made up his mind to go there at night to overcome his fear. At the time, he was only in the fourth grade. "During the day," he said, "I saw an empty grave. As soon as it became dark, my heart started pounding, but I went and sat in it. It was hard at first, but then I got used to it. Sitting there for quite a while, I became accustomed to it. I took heart, and I started to go from one tomb to another, being careful to stay out of sight so no one would think that I was some kind of ghost. And that was that: I went there three nights, stayed late, and my fear left me."

He felt great love for God, and his prayer was an expression of this love. On major feast days he kept vigil, lit the oil lamp, and prayed standing through the night. His oldest brother gave him trouble: when he would get up at night to read the Psalter, his brother wouldn't let him, pushing him back under the covers. But behavior like this didn't weaken

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25. See *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 20:7: "Do not hesitate to go late at night to those places where you usually feel afraid... As you go on your way, arm yourself with prayer. When you reach the place, stretch out your hands [in prayer]" (p. 131).

his zeal—it only increased his love for God.

From a young age he would go out into the forest to collect acorns. He would drive a hole into them with a nail, pass a string through them, and use them as his prayer-rope in order to count his prayers and prostrations.

The Elder's sister Christina remembered that once, when their parents were in the fields, it started to rain. Arsenios thought of how they were getting wet, and took the two youngest children to the icon corner. They knelt down, prayed, and the rain stopped.

When lightning would strike, he would often say, "Great is the name of the Holy Trinity."

His monastic inclination thus showed itself early. When people would ask what he wanted to be when he grew up, Arsenios, even though he had yet to meet one in person, would always answer, "a monk."

The Elder also related the following: "When I was still in school, I would read the lives of the Saints, and from then on I wanted to become an ascetic. I would often go outside the village. I was eleven years old then. One day I noticed a large rock, and the day after I set out to ascend it and become a stylite. I got there after hiking in the mountains for an hour and a half. The rock was high up, and with some difficulty I climbed on top of it and started to pray. I used up all my energy, and then I started to think, 'The hermits had roots to eat—a little water, some dates. You don't have anything up here. How are you going to live?' I was hungry and couldn't last any longer, so I said, 'I'll go down and eat some wild greens.' But how was I going to get down? I had gotten up all right, but getting down? I finally tumbled down—it's amazing I didn't get killed! The

Panagia protected me so I wouldn't end up smashed to pieces on the rocks. So, slowly limping along, I set out for home. I got lost in the dark and had a difficult time of it, but I finally made it home around midnight."

A Carpenter

According to the testimony of his classmates from elementary school, Arsenios was prudent and careful, a beloved child, especially thoughtful about his actions, and reverent during their religious education studies. He was a good student, bright, quick-witted, and magnanimous; and his warmth towards others extended to the point of self-sacrifice. He had lively and expressive eyes, which were so bright that people called him "firefly."

Little Arsenios finished elementary school with a grade of eight[26] and a conduct certificate marked "excellent." Nonetheless, he decided not to continue with his studies, since Konitsa had no middle school, and he wanted to become a carpenter, since he loved the craft of our Lord.

During his apprenticeship to a master carpenter, he would find some excuse to avoid eating with him and would go home and quickly eat there, returning immediately. Later on the carpenter realized that he did this so as not to break his fast.

When he had learned his craft well, he made a beautiful icon stand for the family home and a cross, like the one he had seen the Holy Martyrs hold in the icons. Later, he

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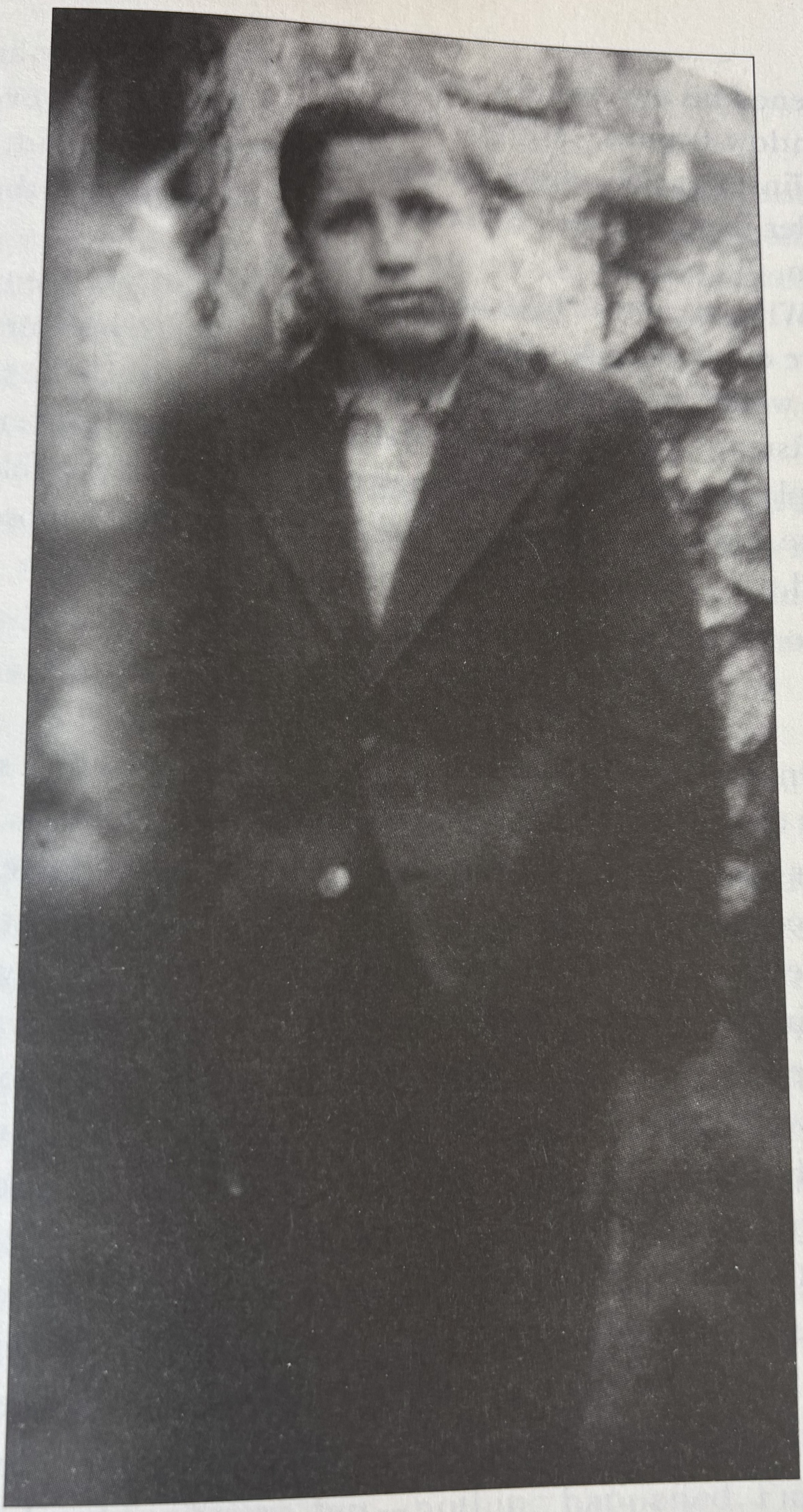
26. The grading system ranged from one to ten, with a five being a passing grade. – eds.



The Elder during childhood

opened his own wood-working shop. He made door-and window-frames, ceilings, floors, icon stands, and even coffins. For the coffins he would never take payment, in order to express his sympathy for the mourners in their pain.

When it came to his trade, he had a true gift, and people were quite pleased with his work. Everywhere in Konitsa one would hear, "What a boy Evlampia's son is! He's a fine craftsman, quick and dependable, and just and sincere." People chose him over other craftsmen, and so he was able to make ends meet, help his family, and give alms to those in need.

A Grace-filled Child

Once, word spread in Konitsa that Arsenios had seen Saint George and had fasted afterward for many days. The Elder himself never said anything about it, and no one else has confirmed it, so it may have been only a rumor. But that the people there believed it shows the great respect they had for him: they considered him to be adorned richly by God with exceptional grace. There was even a Moslem woman who would invite him to her house on the first day of the month, in order to make the month go well. He was in school with her children, some of whom were subsequently baptized Christians. After the Elder became a monk, she would express her respect for him, saying, "I would give my life for you." Moved by his presence, with faith she would take dust from his shoes and spread it over her paralyzed hand.

With the Cross as his Guide

"One day," the Elder related, "my brothers and sisters were working in the field. Our mother was making food for them, but she was upset because there was no one to take it to them, and the field was two hours away."

"I said to her, 'Give it to me to take to them.'

'But you don't know how to get there.'

'I'll ask,' I replied.

"I set off without asking anyone, but I was holding a cross in my hand just like I had seen in the icons of the holy martyrs. I barely knew how I got there. I arrived at the field, delivered the food, and went back right away, since my mother was waiting for me."

A Vision of God

The Elder once said, "From the age of eleven, I read the lives of the Saints, fasted, and kept vigil. My older brother would take the books and hide them, but that didn't stop me. I would just go into the forest and keep reading there."

Later, when Arsenios was fifteen, a friend of his brother's named Costas told his brother, "I'll make him willingly give up all this stuff." As the Elder related, "He came and explained to me Darwin's theory of evolution. I was shaken by this, and I said, 'I'll go and pray, and, if Christ is God, He'll appear to me so that I'll believe. A shadow, a voice – He'll show me something.' That's all I could come up with.

"So, I went and began to pray and make prostrations, which I did for hours, but – nothing happened. Finally I stopped in a state of exhaustion. Then something Costas had

said came to mind: 'I can accept that Christ is an important man,' he had told me, 'righteous and virtuous, Who was hatred out of envy for His virtue and condemned by His countrymen.' I said to myself, 'Since that's how Christ was, even if He was only a man, He deserves my love, obedience, and self-sacrifice. I don't want paradise—I don't want anything. It is worth making every sacrifice for the sake of His holiness and kindness.'[27]

"God was waiting to see how I would deal with this temptation. And after this Christ Himself appeared to me in a great light. He was visible from the waist up. He looked on me with tremendous love and said to me, 'I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.'[28] He was holding open the Gospel in His left hand, where the same words were written."

With this event, the uncertainties that had troubled Arsenios's young soul were overcome, and in divine grace he was given to know Christ as true God and Savior of the world. He was convicted of the truth of the God-man,[29] not by men or by books, but by the very Lord Himself, Who revealed

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27. This reaction is an excellent example of Arsenios's good thoughts and his spirit of eager goodness. ["Eager goodness" renders the Greek *philotimo*, a word which cannot be simply translated. It literally means "the love of honor," and in Modern Greek it refers to the active love of the good for its own sake, especially as this is manifest in selfless giving. As the author notes, this anecdote is highly illustrative: *"I don't want paradise—I don't want anything. His holiness and goodness are worth every sacrifice all on their own."* The phrase "Eager goodness" has been chosen to convey the active sense and the sincerity that the word implies.—Trans.]

28. John 11:25.

29. In Greek, *Theanthropos*, a term emphasizing the reality of the incarnation of Christ, at once fully God and fully man.—Trans.

Himself to Arsenios even at his tender age. Now, firmly established in faith, he thought to himself, "Costas, come back now if you want to, and we'll have a talk."

Preparation for the Monastic Life

From that point on he struggled with greater zeal and began to think with greater fervor about dedicating himself entirely to God. And so fifteen-year-old Arsenios went to the metropolitan of Ioannina and asked the chancellor if, at his age, he could become a monk. But the chancellor answered him, "You're too young now: later on, after you have grown up a bit."

Arsenios had exalted views about the monastic life, and he prepared himself for it as best he could, living and struggling like a monk. When people tried to propose matches for him, he put a stop to it for good – "I'm going to become a monk," he would answer. Once, at a wedding, his father wished Arsenios a happy match as well. From that point on, he never kissed his father's hand again – not out of a lack of respect for him, but in silent disagreement, signifying that it wasn't his father's wish but the prophecy of Saint Arsenios that he wished to come to pass.[30] A path was opening before Arsenios – the monks' angelic life.

His relatives came to understand him. He didn't need to convince them with words: his life and struggles were the

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30. In Greece at this time, it was common for a child to kiss his father's hand on the occasion of a special visit or event, and before receiving Holy Communion. (A child might also kiss the hands of the aged or other respected members of his community.) – eds.

proof of his intentions and the first-fruits of what the gracefilled boy would become. He spent his free time at the chapel of Saint Barbara outside the village, passing his time with other reverent young men. Among them were the future Abbot Paul (Zissakis) of the Holy Monastery of the Great Lavra* on Mount Athos* and the future Elder Cyril (Manthos) of Bourazeri* Hermitage, also on Mount Athos. They would read the services together daily starting with the Midnight Service. In the evening, they would read Vespers and Compline with the Akathist Hymn* to the Mother of God, followed by Holy Scripture and the lives of the Saints. Since there were no functioning monasteries in the area, Arsenios sought out virtuous monastic elders elsewhere. Once, he and the future abbot of the Great Lavra went to meet an Elder named Father Iakovos Balodemos. Elder Paisios later recalled him as a holy man and excellent spiritual father, and he related many amazing and miraculous matters concerning him.

Arsenios tried to get himself used to the monastic life. He chose bland, tasteless food, and he wouldn't put salt on it so he wouldn't have to drink very much water. He refused to allow his mother or sisters to wash his clothes, insisting on washing them himself.

When he and his siblings would head to the fields to work, he used to hang back and tell them to go on ahead. Once out of curiosity, they stayed and spied on him to see what he was doing. To their astonishment, he took off his shoes and ran barefoot in a field covered in cut clover. It was like he was running on top of sharp nails: the stems, sharp from being cut, slit his skin, cutting into his feet and leaving them covered in blood. Despite the pain, he persevered joyfully imi-

tating the martyrs he had read about and trying to commune with their experience as well as to participate in their sufferings. In such a way did his young soul blaze with divine love and the mindset of the Martyrs.[31]

Once a week he would climb the nearby mountains, spending the day there in prayer, fasting, spiritual reading, and prostrations. He was drawn by the quiet, and he wanted to become worthy of living like the ascetics and hermits. He would bring a cross with him, and, as he put it, "I had so much faith then, when I was climbing the mountain with the cross, that I wasn't afraid of anything."

His older brother Raphael, seeing how he had increased his struggles, tried to stop him. Arsenios had always silently accepted his brother's supervision in the past. But now, at fifteen years of age, he stood up for himself, and after that his brother didn't try to interfere anymore. (In fact, later, after Arsenios became a monk, his brother asked his forgiveness for his behavior.) His parents, on the other hand, were overjoyed by Arsenios and proud of him. Being reverent people, they understood his struggles and saw no need to worry.

Arsenios struggled with youthful enthusiasm, but also with the wisdom and discernment of an elder, undertaking his ascetic struggles with great caution and self-examination. Every day, he would consider what he had done, what he had said, and whether he had hurt anyone by his behavior.

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31. The Elder's desire in his teenage years to experience bodily pain in sympathy with the martyrs—something strange and even alarming to modern ears—must be understood in the context of his singleness of heart and noble simplicity. He was then, as he would remain throughout his life, full of joy.—eds.

Caring for Others

Through his conscientious life and his words of counsel, Arsenios helped other children. He spent most of his time with younger children. He would get them together at the church of Saint Barbara, where they would read the lives of the Saints, and he encouraged them to fast and make prostrations in prayer to God. Because of this, some mothers started to worry, and forbade their children to spend time with him. The parents of one boy who had worked with Arsenios for the same craftsman and who prayed together with him, were afraid that their son would become a monk, and they wouldn't let him spend time with Arsenios or even continue struggling spiritually on his own. (Later, the boy would be killed in Germany, where he had gone to work, and his parents, remorseful, would admit that it would have been better if he had become a monk after all.) There was a child from Farasa who Arsenios wanted to take with him, to help the boy become a monk, so he tried to persuade the boy's mother to permit it. He also supported another local man in his priestly vocation. And a priest – a native of Konitsa – testifies to the help Arsenios had provided him in his monastic calling.

He wanted so much for the people around him to come to know God. Once, he got to know a certain old shepherd who lived alone in the mountains, who had only gone to church two or three times in his life, and saw to it that he drew near to Christ.

When the mother of a local Muslim man became sick, young Arsenios would go to their house at night to help

her.[32] Afterward, the man announced that he wanted to become a Christian. Arsenios would give away the small amount of money that he made as a carpenter's apprentice to children from the orphanage, and bring other poor children home to eat with his family.

In a letter entitled "My memories of a Saint," Apostolos Hadjirubis writes: "Arsenios and I lived in different neighborhoods. The first time I saw him I was impressed by his liveliness. When he worked as a carpenter's apprentice, he was distinguished for his agility, his eagerness, and above all his kind-heartedness. The master carpenter would later say that 'Arsenios was one of a kind.'

"We were farmers' children, and we would graze our horses in a common pasture. It was then that I came to know the splendor of Arsenios's soul. Amidst all of our childish bickering, he was clearly the only one who preferred to be wronged rather than to do wrong to someone else.

"Every time we met, it became more and more clear to me that all of his effort was directed toward confessing the Lord. He always carried with him one church book or another that he would frequently read. I remember how zealous he was to get the children to listen to him at any price — for instance, he would take care of our animals, carry water for us, and so on, just as long as we would give him our attention as he read from Holy Scripture.

"I will never forget his fervor while reading, describing Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. He became so animated that even the most unruly children paid attention. In his young face, I could see with perfect clarity his great joy and satis-

32. The man's name was Bairamis.

faction that he was able to communicate the word of the Lord to such an innocent and pure audience. As I recall, he continued his lessons for four or five more years, until he left for the army."

Trials and Dangers

While Arsenios's teenage years were occupied with ascetic struggles, free from worldly cares, the years that would follow brought great trials. The Second World War, the Italian invasion of Greece, the Axis occupation, and the Greek civil war were the backdrop for a period of many hardships and dangers for Arsenios.

During the German occupation, many poor people came to his mother to trade their valuables in exchange for a handful of flour. Although she would give them flour and bread, she refused to take their money or their family heirlooms. She would also frequently knead bread that would quickly run out since she gave so much of it to the hungry. In like manner, Arsenios's brother Raphael would distribute corn, refusing to accept money in return, but sometimes trading it for oil that he would bring to the Church as an offering. Years later, the Elder would express his regrets for not being able to help more people during those years of occupation and famine on account of his age.

During the Greek civil war, the communist rebels took Arsenios captive and put him in prison, where he suffered greatly.[33] He contracted head louse and endured over-

33. At the end of the Second World War, a civil war started in Greece when communist rebels aided by the Communist powers, attempted to usurp power.

crowded conditions, sleeping in a small room that held so many men that, when they would rest, the last to lie down had to wedge himself in. He was put to the test morally, as well: his captors locked him in a room by himself and then sent in two communist women who were nearly naked. Praying fervently to the Mother of God, he immediately felt power from on high strengthening him so that he looked upon them dispassionately as his sisters, just as Adam saw Eve in paradise. When he spoke to them with kindness, they came to their senses and left in a state of tears.

During his interrogation, the interrogator asked him, "Why did they arrest you?"

"Because my older brother is with Zervas," he replied.[34]

"And why is he with Zervas?"

"Of the two of us, who is older? Do I tell him what to do?" Out of respect for his sincerity and courage, they released him.

He once gave some bread to a group of communist rebels who were hungry and weary, even though he knew that they intended to kill his brother. They were understandably suspicious, because they couldn't understand his selfless love, which inspired him to feed them even at the risk of being put on trial by their leaders. He even protected them from people who wanted revenge for their relatives slain in the fighting.

The civil war ended in 1949 with the victory of the democratic government.—eds.

34. Napoleon Zervas was a general in the Greek Army. During the Axis occupation, he organized an exceptionally active group of volunteers. He fought first against the Germans and then against the nation's communists. After the liberation of Greece, he became involved in political life.

He lived amidst constant trials and dangers. Once, eight rebels seized his family's home and used it as an encampment for months. For two months Arsenios lived in the house of a Moslem family; other times he was forced to hide outdoors, in the countryside, during the snowy winter. On another occasion, the rebels used him as forced labor, compelling him to accompany them to the region of Macedonia.

He also spent two months with his sister, Christina, in Ioannina*. During his time there, a friend who had become an Evangelical protestant came to visit, leaving behind a bag full of heretical books. When he saw them, Arsenios instructed his sister to burn them, telling her that they were full of poison.

In the battle of Konitsa he helped as a volunteer caring for the wounded and burying the dead.[35]

The Staff and Support of his Family

Arsenios would often see his mother sobbing from her worries about his brothers who were involved in the fighting, and he would console and support her. He didn't try to satisfy his own pious desires and become a monk then, because in those difficult days people needed him. As the Elder would later say, "Being estranged from the world doesn't mean that I do whatever I want and treat everyone

35. At the end of the civil war (1949) communist rebels were encouraged by the communist block to concentrate their forces in order to capture a city. They attacked Konitsa with overwhelming forces, hoping that by occupying this small northern city they could proclaim it as their "free capital". However, they were unsuccessful. —eds.

else like they're blocks of cement." He continued to struggle spiritually, of course, but for the time being he postponed paying his "vows unto the Lord."[36]

He took responsibility for the many chores on the farm. The family had hired a laborer who was rather impertinent. When they went out, he would mount the horse, leaving Arsenios to walk beside him. It looked as though he was in charge and Arsenios his employee: he worked whenever he felt like it, and Arsenios never objected, but simply worked as hard as possible himself.

When Arsenios would take the animals out to pasture, he would remove their pack-saddles and walk beside them, because he preferred to tire out himself rather than them. When people would ask him why he had taken the pack-saddles off, though, he would simply say that he didn't want them to get caught on branches. At harvest-time, when others took a midday rest, Arsenios would gather hay in order to feed the horse and if he had figs, instead of eating them himself, he would give them to the animals. He was more concerned for the animal's welfare than for his own.

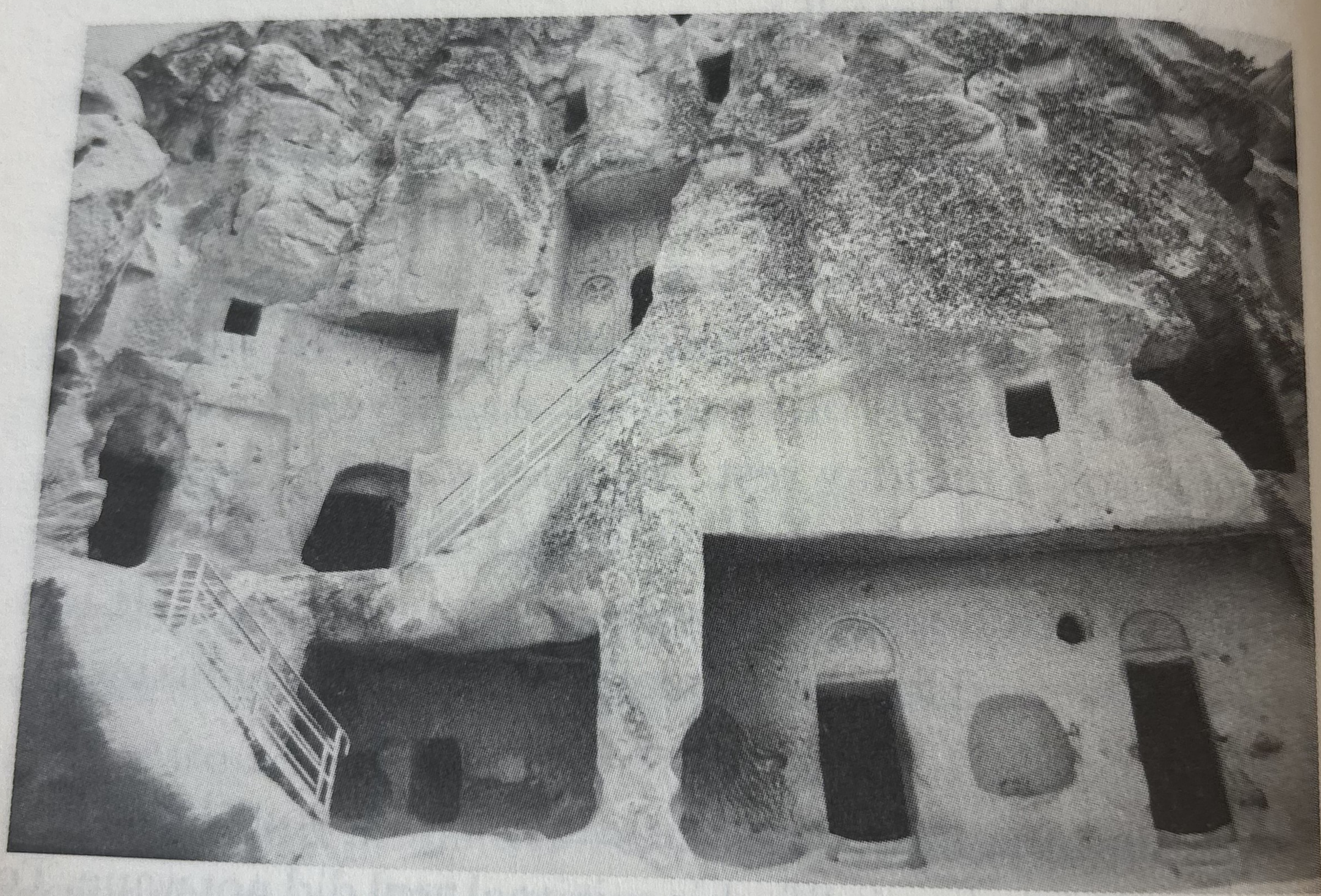
Though the war caused Arsenios to postpone his departure for the monastic life, his spiritual zeal did not wane. To the spiritual labors he had already undertaken, he added new and more intense ascetic struggles.

Arsenios watched as matters deteriorated for Greece: it would not be long before he would be called to serve his country. In the chapel of Saint Barbara, he beseeched the Mother of God: "Let me suffer, let me be in danger, only

36. Ps. 115:5, 9 (116:14, 18).

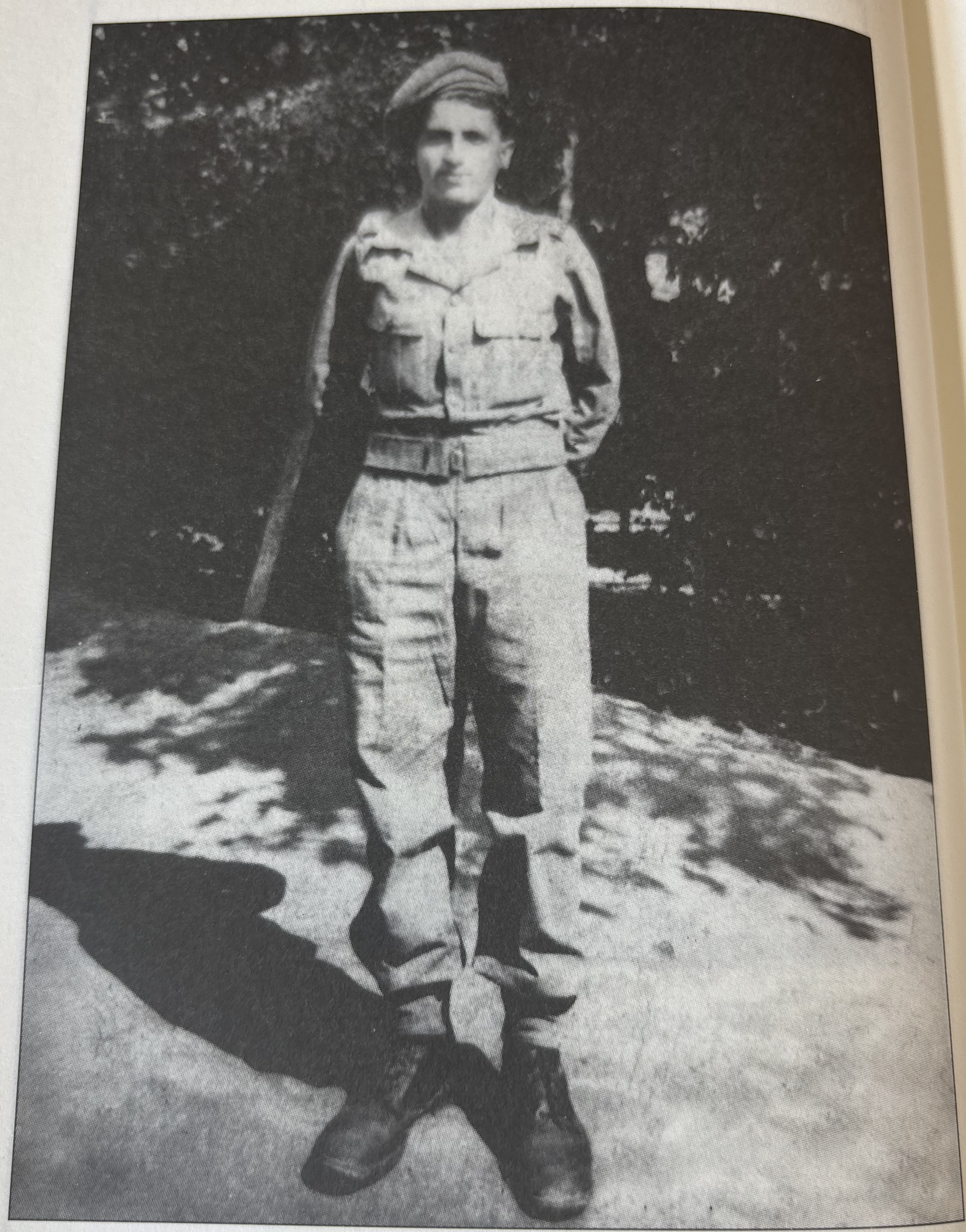
don't let me kill anyone; and make me worthy to become a monk."

Then he made a vow to the Mother of God, that if she protected him during the war he would spend three years in the service of her monastery, in Stomio, working to rebuild that which the Nazis burned down.



Cappadocia. Churches carved into the rock.

Military Service



The Soldier Arsenios Eznepidis.

A Virtuous Signalman

On April 20, 1948, he was called to serve his country. He reported for duty in Corinth, and after two days he was transferred to the Basic Training Center in Tripoli where he learned to be a military signalman. Afterward, he was transferred to Agrinion.

People asked him, "How did you get such a good job? Who do you know?"

"No one," he replied.

"Come on!"

"Umm... God." And indeed, in the words of Scripture, "the Lord was with [him], and he was a successful man."[37]

He loved people to the point of self-sacrifice. He willingly served their shifts and in general worked very hard. For example, when someone wanted to go on leave, Arsenios would gladly fill in for him. A lot of people took advantage of his goodwill, thinking that he was a fool. But he found joy in the sacrifices he made, and accepted them as opportunities for solitude and prayer. "What is it with that guy?" his commander would wonder. "He never asks for a break."

Once, he became ill, with a temperature of one hundred

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37. Gen. 39:2. [The passage refers to Joseph the All-Comely. Old Testament quotations, except from the Psalter and where otherwise noted, are from the 2008 *Orthodox Study Bible*.—eds.]

and three degrees, and refused to ask for a leave of duty. In the end it was too much for him, and he collapsed. The other soldiers had figured out that he was going to become a monk, and, as they put him on a stretcher, they sarcastically called him by monastic names: "Hey, Benedict! Hey, Akakios!"[38] But, slowly, their sarcasm changed into respect and admiration, as his way of life, great love, and integrity won them over. They stopped regarding him as a dupe and felt that he was an asset and a blessing for the unit.

His job as a signalman spared him from armed participation in the war, such that, by divine grace, he did not have to kill anyone. And it foreshadowed the task he would take on as a monk, sending messages to God with his prayer.

Hardships

The company in which the Elder served carried out combat operations that caused them to endure hardships that were utterly unbelievable. He related that once, having run out of food, his company was reduced to eating snow flakes. Another time they were left without food for thirteen days and survived on wild chestnuts. More frequently, they suffered from dehydration, and then they were forced to drink water that had accumulated in animals' footprints. Their greatest enemy was the cold. They slept in tents, and when they woke up in the morning the tents would be covered in snow, and they would count how many had developed frostbite. One morning, digging in the snow with

38. "Monastic names"; that is, names more commonly given in Greece to tonsured monks than to laymen. – eds.

a pickaxe, Arsenios uncovered twenty-three frostbitten men.

He once spent three straight days in the snow sending messages to headquarters, which caused him to get frostbite. The flesh was peeling off his feet, and his company had to send him to the hospital, but God saved him from amputation. Another time, a mule kicked him so hard in the chest that it turned black-and-blue, marked with the imprint of the horseshoe. Although he fainted, when he came to, he continued on his way.

It made Arsenios happy to be rained-on, cold, or tired, so that others wouldn't have to be. Sometimes when his fellow soldiers made mistakes, they would blame them on Arsenios. The sergeant would reprimand him, and he, wanting to cover the errors of his fellow soldiers, would humbly accept the rebuke.

Nevertheless, the commanding officer valued him and trusted him. It was Arsenios he would send on the most difficult missions, because he knew he was the most capable and that he would accomplish whatever mission he had been assigned.

He took leave only once, going home. While there, he fell ill and lost a lot of blood, and he was admitted to the hospital for fifteen days. When he recovered, he returned to his unit.

Ascetic Struggles and Experiences

In the midst of these difficulties, Arsenios also engaged in a life of spiritual struggle involving fasting and prayer. He would usually eat only half of what he was allowed to, and when the time came for silence and rest he would go up onto the terraced roof of a building in his camp and begin to pray.

path a couple of inches wide but no scar at all. I did what I did from the heart. 'It's better,' I thought, 'for me to die once, than for someone else to die and for my conscience to kill me for the rest of my life. How would I live, knowing that I could have saved him, and I didn't?' Naturally, God really helps people who sacrifice themselves for others."

He does Good and is Slandered

"I went around to my fellow soldiers collecting money," recalled the Elder, "to buy oil lamps and candle-stands for a chapel that was near our camp and dedicated to Saint John the Forerunner. In the middle of winter, the transport came, animals in tow, to bring us supplies." The transport was manned by villagers, many of whom were women and children. The Elder continued: "The weather turned bad and it started to snow, and they spent the night there, in makeshift tents made from evergreen fir trees.

"One of the young women was being cruelly harassed by a second lieutenant. The poor girl would've rather died than sin. She left camp followed by an old woman, and they treaded through the snow. They found themselves outside the chapel, but the door was shut, so they were left shivering out in the cold and standing under the overhang of the roof.

"That same night, a thought suddenly came to me, insistent, telling me to go to the chapel and light the oil lamps. The snow had risen to two-and-a-half feet. I went, and, having no idea of what had gone on earlier, I found the two women outside of the chapel, turning blue from the cold. I gave each of them one of my gloves and unlocked the door. After they went inside and regained their composure a bit,

they told me what had happened. 'I did what I could,' said the young girl. 'After that, it's up to God.'

"I felt bad for the poor women, and I spontaneously said, 'Your troubles are over. Tomorrow you'll go home.' And that's just what happened."

The second lieutenant later learned that Arsenios had helped them and they had been rescued. And, perhaps to cover up his guilt, he spread a rumor that Arsenios had put all the women and children in the church along with their animals. Arsenios was called on the carpet. "Am I so careless, sir," he replied to his superior, "that I would put the supply-train and their mules in the church?" But he didn't say anything about the incident involving the second lieutenant. All he did was defend himself, because he had been accused of disrespecting the house of God.

He Saves the Unit

"Once," said the Elder, "our company was dug into a natural fortification made of boulders, surrounded by sixteen hundred rebels. All of the soldiers were carrying ammunition, and the commander called me over and told me to put down my radio and do the same. In fact, he threatened me with his pistol: he thought I avoided carrying the ammunition because I wanted to keep out of danger.

"I picked up some ammunition, but I also went over to the radio and tried to make contact with headquarters. After trying again and again, I got through and told them what trouble we were in. The next day—when the rebels had gotten so close we could hear them swearing—our air support came and knocked them for a loop."

The Elder would refer to this incident when people would ask him what good monks do out in the desert, and why they don't go into the world and help people. "Monks," he would reply, "are the Church's signalmen. When they make contact with God through prayer, then God comes and helps even more" than the monk would have by working in the world. "One more rifleman was useless, but when the Air Force got there, the battle was won."

Self-sacrifice

When a monk from Corfu named Father Arsenios[40] was still a layman, he served with the Elder in the war and was likewise a signalman. "In Nafpaktos," recalls Fr. Arsenios, "while I was receiving a transmission from Patras, Arsenios came up to me and said, 'Did you know we're brothers?'

'How are we brothers?' I asked.

He extended his two thumbs and said, 'We've got the same fingers—yours are just like mine. That's why.'"

And indeed they both had the same unusual deformation of the thumbs: the last bone was smaller and his fingernails nearly half the normal size.

They loved each other like brothers, and Arsenios once risked his life to save his fellow signalman. Years later, the monk still can't describe what happened without sobbing with gratefulness for his friend and rescuer. As he recounts, "We were in a firefight not far from Nafpaktos, and the rebels outnumbered us. While we were retreating, I fell to the ground because of the heavy radio strapped to my back.

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40. At that time, the monk's name was Pantelis Tzekos.

When the other soldiers made it to the fallback position, Arsenios saw that I was missing, and he took off his radio and started running back to me. The officers and soldiers were yelling, 'Forget him – he's a goner!' He reached my position, as they told me later, lifted me onto his back, and carried me back to our line of defense. When I came to, I heard Captain Voudouris say to him, 'You must've had a Saint helping out, for you to help this guy.' I asked what had happened and they told me. The place I had fallen was about a hundred yards from the rebel line, and two hundred yards from our own."

Prayer in the Midst of Bullets

"One day," continues Pantelis, "we were on the top of a ridge they called Killer Ridge. The rebels had us surrounded and there was no exit or way out. Arsenios was standing while the bullets flew past us right and left. I grabbed his coat and tried to pull him down, but he stayed just as he was, looking up to the sky with his hands held in prayer. Apparently the Almighty took pity on us, because our air support arrived and opened up the road.

"As we left, I said to him, 'So what was all that about? Why didn't you take cover?'

'I was praying,' he replied.

'Praying?' I asked. I was more than a little amazed.

"What power his prayer had, and how great his faith was that he could stand there, defying the bullets! He was probably asking God that everyone else be spared even if he himself lost his life – that is most likely why he stood there so exposed. And, in the end, God in His righteousness looked

down on Arsenios's self-sacrifice and saved both him and them."

Disobedience to a Blasphemer

The Elder once related an event that took place shortly before his discharge: "After the war ended, when we were returning from Florina, I heard the captain speaking blasphemously about all that's holy. I went up to him and told him, 'From now on I'm refusing to obey your orders, because by blaspheming God you're offending my faith and the oath I took [to country, faith, and family]'. This offended him and he called me insolent. Later, when the captain issued a command, I answered, 'I told you – from now on I'm not obeying your commands.' Then the lieutenant said to me, 'Let's just call it settled.'

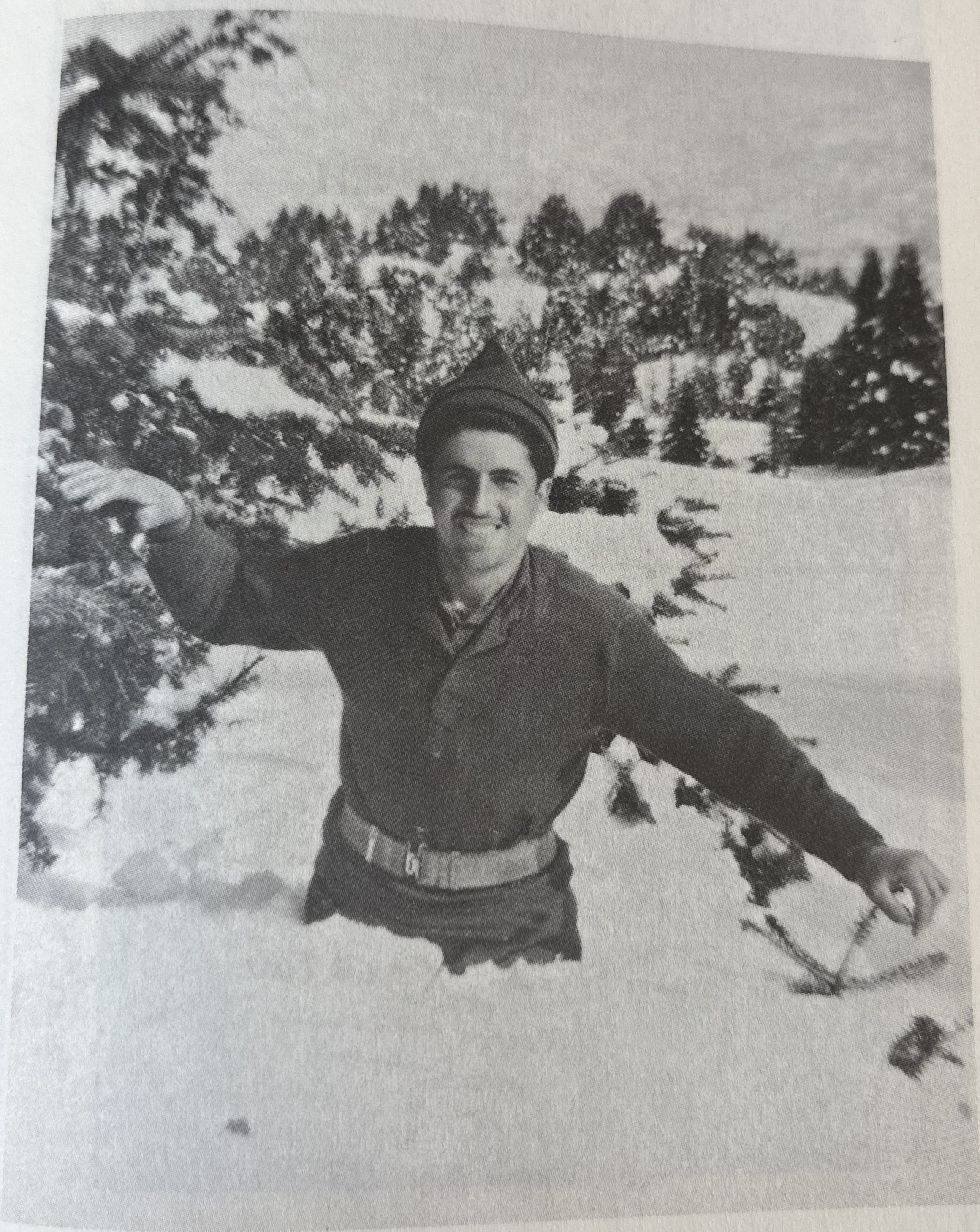
"When we arrived at the camp, I went immediately to the commander to report the situation. He told me that refusing to obey an officer's orders was grounds for a court martial. I repeated what I had said before, that I refused to obey the captain's commands since he was violating his oath by blaspheming God, to Whom both of us had sworn the oath. With a sense of indignation, I told him, 'We ought to obey God rather than men.'"[41]

Having served his country, on March 21, 1950 Arsenios was discharged from the Army at Makrakomi in Lamia.

When he was bidding Pantelis goodbye, his signalman friend invited him to join him in Corfu, where they could each build a house and start a family. But Arsenios kindly

41. Acts 5:29.

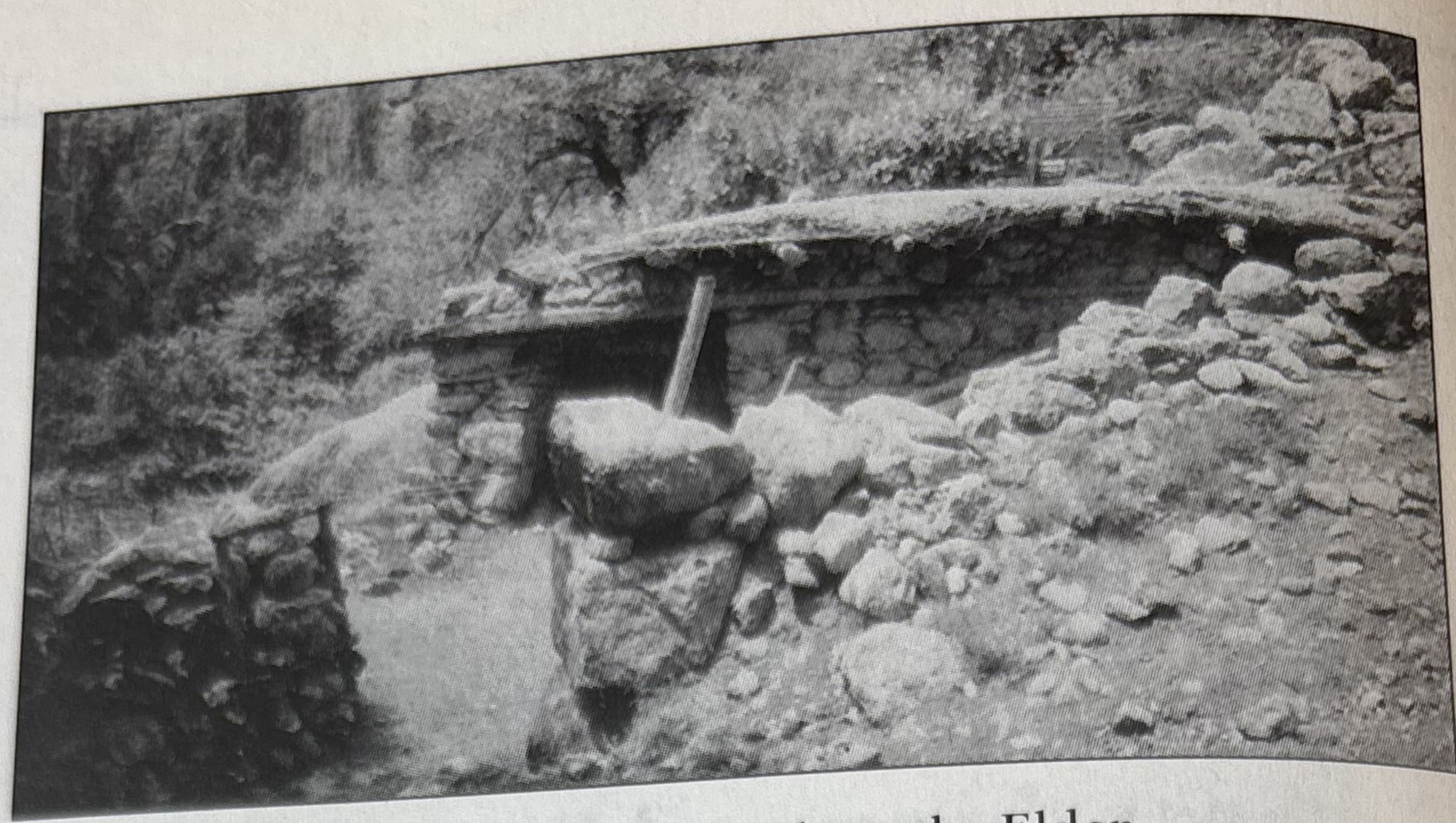
turned him down, explaining that he was going to become a monk. Indeed, having finished his tour of duty, he was looking forward to another kind of military service: his enlistment in the monastic order, in the service of his heavenly King.



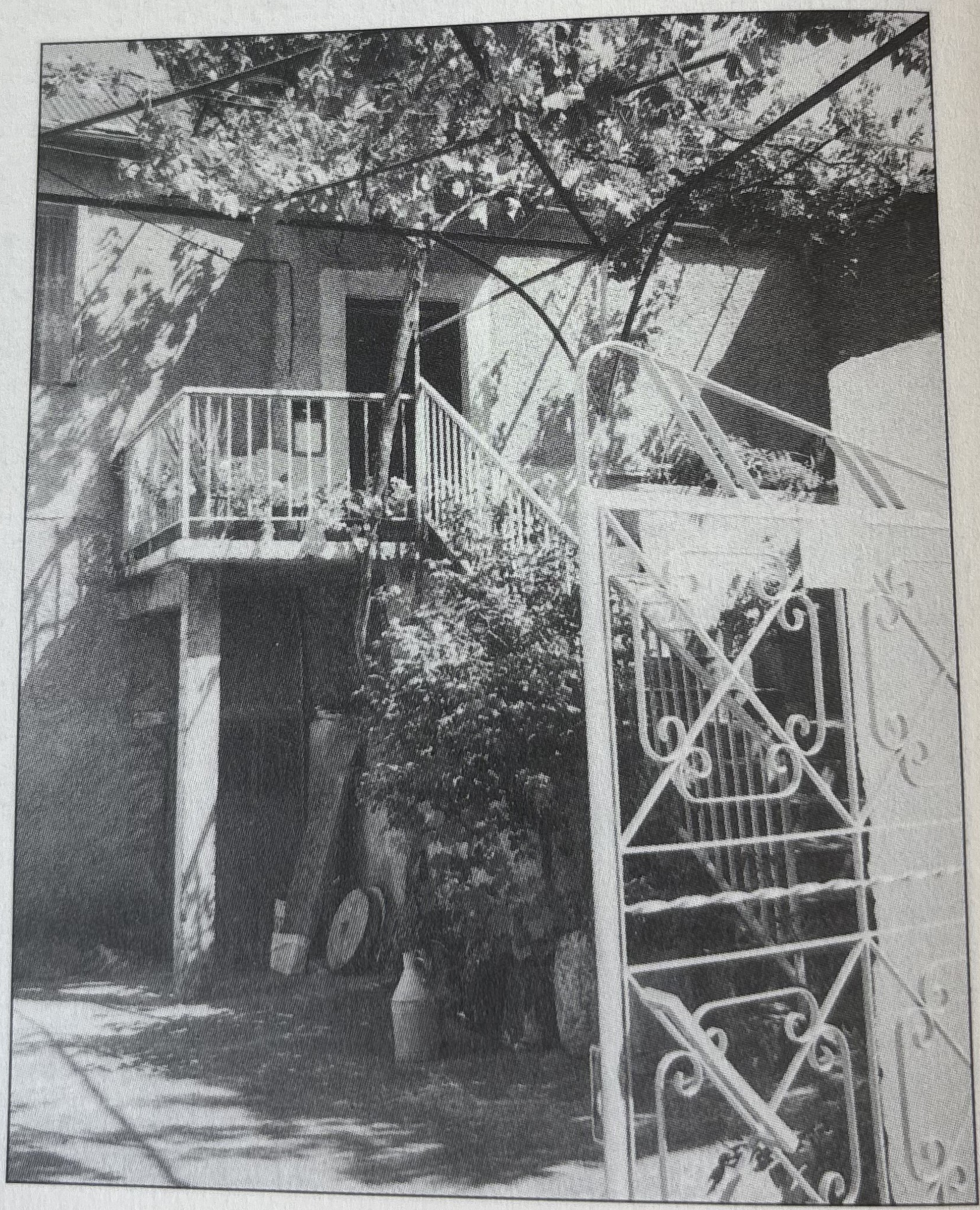
The Elder during his military service playing in the snow.

Farasa. The left arrow on the rocky mountain indicates the entrance to Panagia's cave church.
The right arrow indicates the entrance to Saint Basil's church.

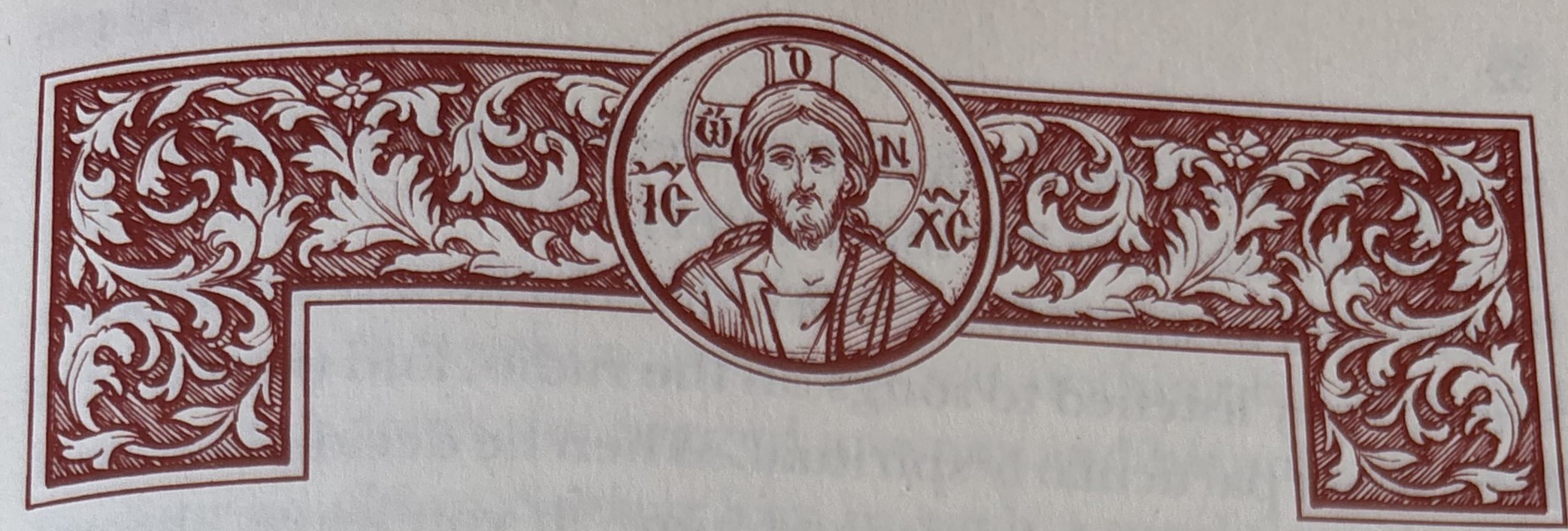
Searching and Preparing



Ruins of the house where the Elder was born in Farasa, Turkey.



The house where the Elder grew up in Konitsa.



His First Visit to the Holy Mountain

Arsenios didn't remain for long back home in Konitsa. He was soon off to the Holy Mountain of Athos, dressed in his army uniform, in search of an Elder to whom he could be in obedience. He spent his first night as a guest of the Hermitage of Saint John the Theologian.[42] He continued on, visiting many hermitages, sketes, and cells, since he was inclined toward the life of stillness*.[43] Like a bee darting to fragrant flowers, Arsenios would rush anywhere he heard there were virtuous monks.

He had trouble, however, with certain undiscerning zealots. Not understanding the monks' disputes about the Church calendar, he thought they were called zealots* because they had so much zeal and struggled so intensely. They pestered him and told him he had to be baptized again, even

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42. Saint John the Theologian, a hermitage* of the Monastery of the Great Lavra, is located just below the Monastery of Koutloumousiou outside of Karyes.—eds.

43. That is, the hesychastic life (from the Greek word *hesychia*, meaning "stillness"): a life of inner spiritual work in the Orthodox tradition that is exemplified by the texts of the *Philokalia*. The stillness sought is not outer peace and quiet, but an inward condition. However, the former plays an important role in the acquisition of the latter. As the elder would later write, for the beginner, "[external] stillness, along with asceticism and unceasing prayer, brings inner stillness to the soul, and very quickly" (p.p. 450-457, "A lover of stillness").—eds.

though he had already been baptized by Saint Arsenios (and on the old calendar, for that matter).

He went to stay with a zealot elder, but he was not at peace there. They listened to songs on the radio, and their way of life was not particularly spiritual. When he decided to leave, they pressured and threatened him. "If you leave," he was told, "you'll go to hell. Anyone who leaves his place of repentance won't go to heaven."[44] Arsenios believed them and suffered for a time; but eventually he grew weary and left.

He stayed for a time at a hermitage in Kavsokalyvia* where the fathers were also zealots. During the divine services, they made Arsenios go outside so they wouldn't, as they imagined, be defiled. The elder there already had a monk under him in obedience, but he still asked Arsenios to settle there. "Arsenios," he said to him, "stay here—take care of me in my old age, and close my eyes." Arsenios had grown anxious. He hadn't managed to find anyone that he could perceive as the Elder that God had chosen for him. One night he didn't sleep at all, but spent the whole time praying and making prostrations. In the morning, the younger monk approached him. "Did you spend the entire night tapping your foot on the floor," he asked, "to impress us, to make us think you were making prostrations?" Arsenios held his tongue, but he couldn't figure out why the brother would have such thoughts.

On his way to Saint Anne's Skete*, at in intersection called "the Cross," Arsenios took a wrong turn and began ascend-

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44. In Orthodox tradition, the phrase "his place of repentance" (or "monastery of his repentance") refers to the place where a person became a monastic.—eds.

ing to the peak of Athos. There, he spoke with a hermit in an old, patch-work cassock* with a radiant countenance.[45]

When he reached Saint Anne's, he met a bishop named Hierotheos.[46] By then, Arsenios was nothing but skin and bones, both from the rugged journey and his anxiety about finding an elder. Seeing him in such a condition, the illumined hierarch welcomed him with love and offered him a meal, filling the table with food and giving him a glass of wine.

"Your Eminence," said Arsenios, "I won't be able to drink this."

"Drink it," he replied, making the sign of the Cross over it. "It'll do you good." Afterward, Metropolitan Hierotheos gave him discerning counsel and blessed him.

After this he visited New Skete*, where he entreated one of the elders, Papa-Neophytos from the Hermitage of Saint Demetrios, to let him stay for a while, since he was in such a weakened state that he couldn't decide what to do next. During his stay he learned about a hermit named Seraphim,[47] who became a monk at the hermitage and had gone up to live in a cave on Mount Athos.[48] Arsenios remained at New Skete until he had recovered from his exhaustion.

Arsenios approached the people he met on his travels with simplicity and sincerity. He would reveal his thoughts and intentions to everyone who asked, and it wore him out. He would later write, "... I passed through many hardships until I found what I desired. Of course, no one was to blame

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45. *Athonite Fathers*, pp. 61–62.

46. Metropolitan Hierotheos of Militoupoleos.

47. *Athonite Fathers*, pp. 44–46.

48. That is, on the mountain itself. – Trans.

for my hardships: they happened because of my numerous sins (so I could pay some of them off), and my village simplicity too, because I entrusted myself to everyone I met. I am very thankful to God for everything, because it was all to my great benefit."[49]

"In the beginning," he would later say, "until I was able to sprout my spiritual wings, no one helped me—everyone was goading me. Later on I met some holy men."

Having risked losing, as he would put it, what little brains he had, Arsenios decided to return to the world for family reasons. He had received a letter from his father asking for his help. Arsenios's older brother had gotten married, and he was having a hard time working without him. Arsenios had a deep sense of responsibility and understood perfectly well his obligations to his family—and especially to his younger brother and sister, so he decided to answer his father's call for help.

Arsenios was a brave soul. Although he hadn't found what he was looking for during his time on Athos, the troubles he had experienced had benefited him and he had learned from them. His unsuccessful visit to the Holy Mountain had neither lessened his zeal nor extinguished his hope.

Labor and Preparation

Arsenios began once more to labor as a carpenter in Konitsa and the surrounding villages, in order to help support his father financially and to assist the family with farm chores. He bought his younger sister a sewing machine and

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49. *Epistles*, p. 29 [Translation revised for clarity].

set aside fifty gold coins as a dowry, to make sure she would be taken care of. In secret, Arsenios would mercifully take care of many poor people by helping families who had lost relatives in the war, making their doors and windows free of charge. Naturally, everyone loved him.

His life in the world was a continuous struggle and preparation for the monastic life. He passed his day with hard work and fasting, and he spent most of the night keeping vigil and praying, chanting and making prostrations. Living in a damp basement, he slept on the cement floor to increase his asceticism. After a long day of hard physical labor, his body needed a little rest, but the noble-minded Arsenios thought the only thing that could justify a little rest was getting his legs cut off. And so he forced himself and magnanimously struggled.

After he left the army, he had given up eating meat. He told people he didn't like it, but the real reason was that he wanted to get used to monastic life. He also let his beard grow out. Indeed, though Arsenios lived in the world, he struggled and behaved like a monk. A little hermitage in the recess of a cliff served as his solitary refuge, though he abandoned it when people found out about it. He would often stay at the home of a friend who had a chapel dedicated to the New Martyr George of Ioannina; and he spent all of Great Lent struggling in a monastery in the Peloponnese.

When he would go out to the villages to work, Arsenios was circumspect and discreet. He spoke little, chanting quietly while he did his job. When he couldn't find cooked fasting food, he ate only dry food.[50]

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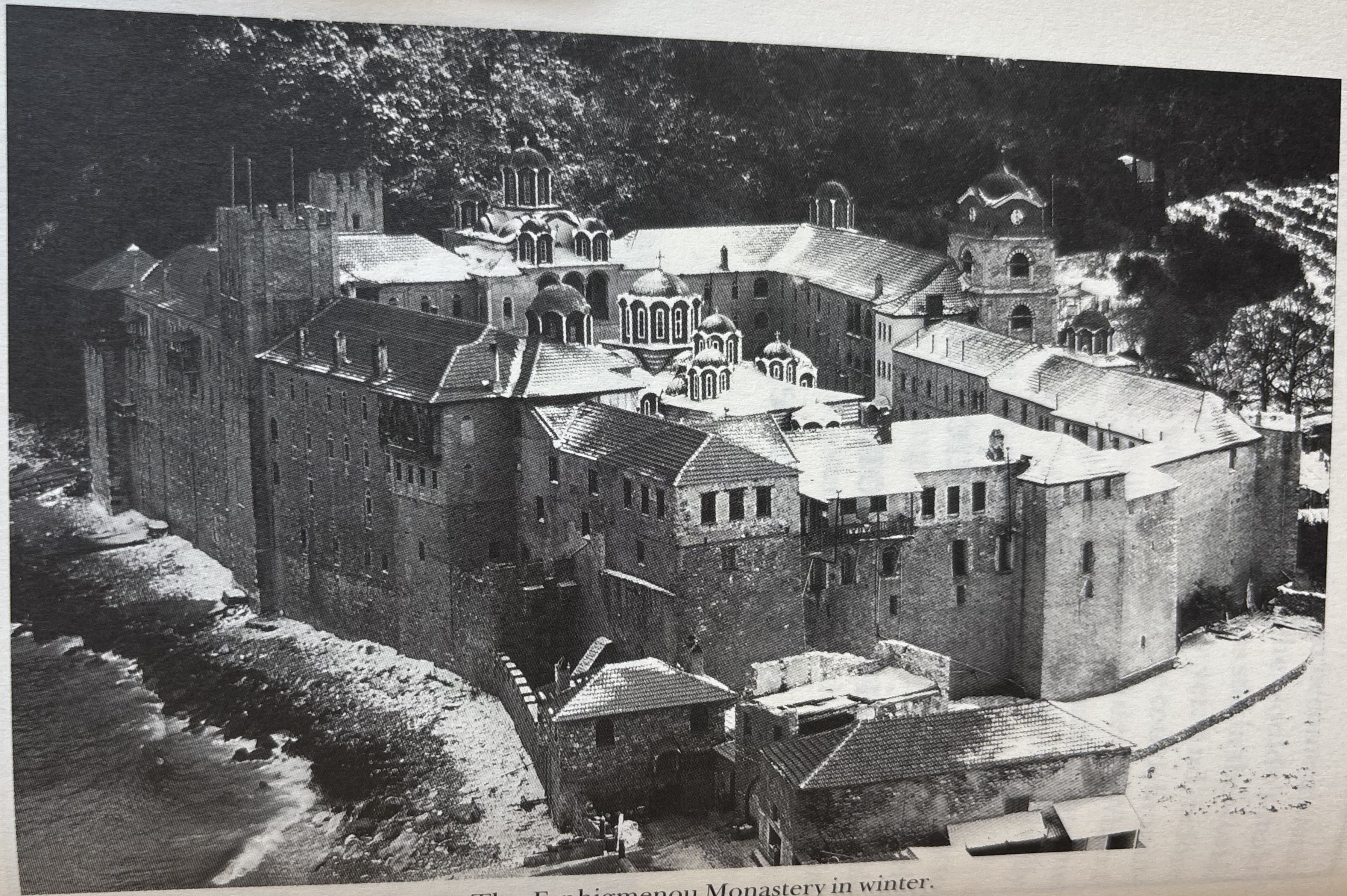
50. That is, uncooked food, raw vegetables or nuts.—eds.

He told his family that he was going to become a monk. But because of his considerateness, so he wouldn't make them feel that they were the reason he was still in the world, he would add that he wasn't quite ready yet. And, before leaving, he arranged everything as well as he could, humanly speaking, not leaving any unfinished business. "When I left to become a monk," he would later remark, "no one could say anything to me." In other words, he had totally fulfilled his duties and obligations to his family.

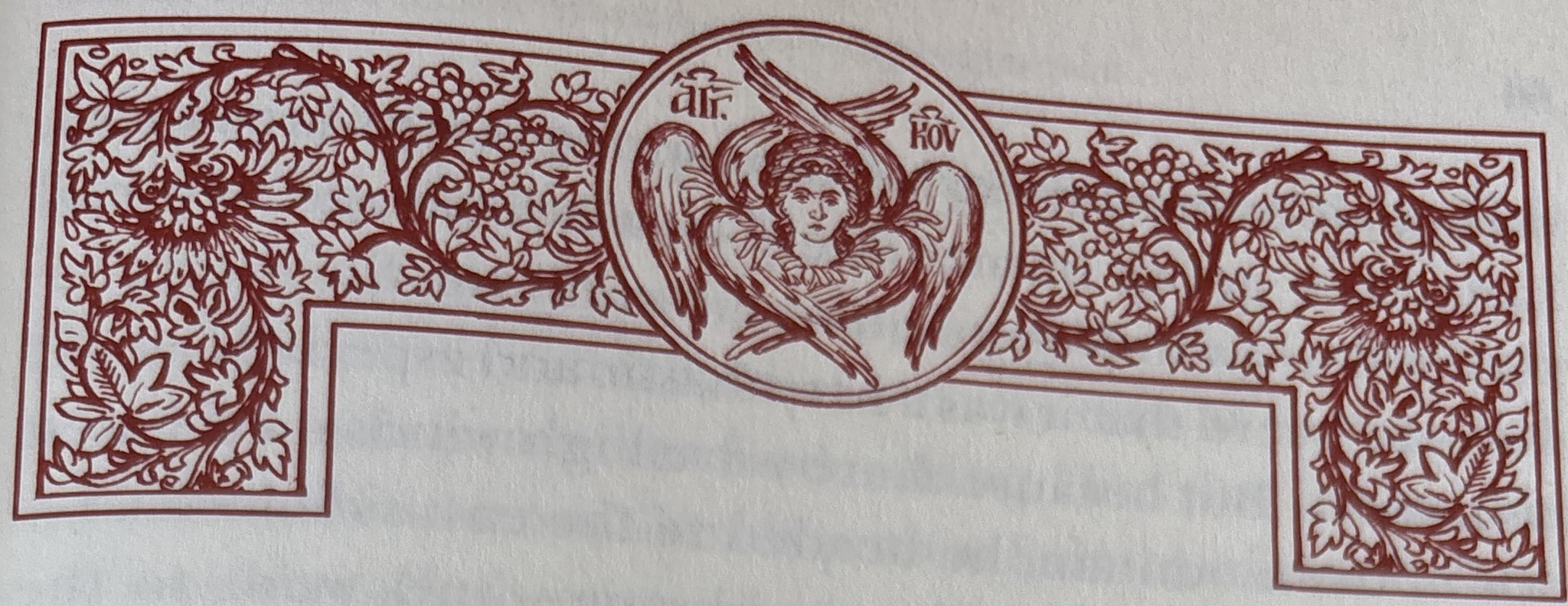
And so, in March of 1953, Arsenios was at last ready to realize his monastic calling, a calling evident from early childhood. After intense prayer, from among three possible destinations, he chose to go once again to the Holy Mountain.

The Mount Athos

Coenobitic Life in the Monastery of Esphigmenou



The Esphigmenou Monastery in winter.



An Obstacle before his Departure

Before Arsenios left Konitsa, he distributed his savings to the poor, keeping only enough money for his trip to the Holy Mountain. Afterward, just as he was about to leave, a poor farmer told him that his ox had died, and begged him to help him to buy another.

Arsenios handled the situation with discernment. "Please forgive me," he replied, "but now I can't help you." If he had given him the money, he would have had to postpone his renunciation of the world once again until he could make back the money for his tickets. But this was what the devil wanted. Arsenios's sensitive heart sympathized with the farmer, but his discernment prompted him to deny his request. As Saint John of the Ladder taught, "One may refuse a good for the sake of a greater good."[51]

Coenobitic* Monastic Life at Esphigmenou*

During Arsenios's first visit to the Holy Mountain, he had gained experience and knowledge. As he began his second visit, he used his discernment and decided to spend time in a

51. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent,* "To the Shepherd," no. 74, p. 242.

coenobitic* monastery so he could sprout his spiritual wings, instead of going immediately to a hermitage. He had planned to go to Konstamonitou* to try the life there, because he heard that it was a hesychastic and especially ascetic monastery. But because there were high winds on the west side of the mountain, he headed to the east side instead—thinking of it as God's providence—and went to the monastery of Esphigmenou.[52] He was accepted by the abbot, Father Kallinikos, and he made a prostration thus beginning his novitiate.

It was a well-run monastery with many diligent and tenacious fathers. In addition to the long hours of Church services, there were also arduous duties to be performed, and each monk had a private prayer-rule. "Making it through Great Lent* at Esphigmenou back then," said the Elder, "was a real Golgotha. You lived on just one plate of boiled food every twenty-four hours. It was the strictest of all the coenobitic monasteries. The fathers spent the first week of Lent in Church almost all the time."

He later related, "When I was in the monastery, there was one monk who really helped me. He wouldn't talk with anyone, because he needed to converse with Christ. His heart just couldn't abide conversing with others. It was enough just to look at him. He helped me more than the lives of the Saints. Because of something he had done wrong, he didn't commune for three years, even though what he had done didn't even deserve a canon* of twenty days. Even though monks don't talk, when they're in such a spiritual

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52. At that time, Esphigmenou was not yet a "zealot" monastery, out of communion with the other monasteries, as it would become later. —Trans.

state, even worldly people are changed by seeing them. This is how the monk preaches."

There was another reverent struggler there who Arsenios admired very much. Without any hint of envy or jealousy, Arsenios prayed to God, asking Him that his brother monk would turn out like his patron Saint, and that he himself would reach the virtuous monk's spiritual condition. Arsenios saw himself as the least among all.

The Novitiate and Obediences*

The new novice advanced joyfully from one struggle of coenobitic life to the next. In the beginning, he was assigned to help at the dining hall and the bakery. Kneading the dough was a quite tiring task in which the monks would work large quantities of dough by hand, which required them to reach to the bottom of a huge trough as they did the kneading.

Later, because he knew carpentry, Arsenios was put in the woodworking shop. Fasting all day long, he would do work such as levelling chestnut-wood with a giant hand-plane. He did everything ably, suitably, and quickly. He even made the animal's wooden pack-saddles, as he put it, "as though they were pieces of furniture."

Arsenios's eager goodness motivated him to ask for a blessing to help in the guesthouse when there were a lot of visitors. He was also responsible for two outlying chapels: every day he would light their oil lamps, keep them clean, and get them ready for the few occasions the Divine Liturgy would be served there.

A Beginner's Struggles

Arsenios had the holy ascetics as his guide, and he struggled to emulate them. He made humble-mindedness and obedience the foundation of his monastic life and gave himself over to struggles that reached beyond his limits. During the day he labored physically, and during the night he stayed awake in prayer glorifying God. He was exhausted but unyielding in his asceticism. He constantly took on new struggles, always with a joyful spirit, the abbot's blessing, and under his supervision. He did everything joyfully. As he later recounted: "All day long, we worked hard at the lathe. In the evening, I went to the guesthouse and helped out until ten or eleven at night. There was no time left for spiritual work, so, when I went back to my cell, I didn't sleep. I just put my legs up, to get some rest and let the blood circulate a bit, since it had collected in my feet from standing all day. Then I would get up and stand in a tub of water, so that I wouldn't fall asleep as I said the prayer with my prayer-rope.[53] I would sleep for about thirty minutes to one hour, then I would go read the midnight office. And, since it occurred to me that maybe, when the time came, I wouldn't be able to fulfill the duties of the Great Schema*, I got a blessing from the abbot to do the rule of the Great Schema as a novice. It wasn't out of conceit: it was because I thought that I might not be able to live up to the obligations of the Schema. I didn't do it with pride – I said to myself, 'If I can't do it, I shouldn't kid myself.'"

He also never sat in church, but stood upright in his

53. "The prayer"; that is, the Jesus Prayer. – Trans.

stall.[54] Sometimes sleep would start to creep up on him, but he would shake it off immediately.

In the winter, he wouldn't light a fire in his cell, which was so humid all the time that mildew formed like cotton-balls on the walls. When the cold became unbearable, he would wrap his legs in the same animal skin he used to make packsaddles. He would work in the cold wearing nothing more than his cassock lined with a piece of newspaper to break the wind.

In the refectory he didn't eat all of his food. He always left a little and when there was cheese he would cover it with the other food and leave it untouched. Part of the monastery rule was that, shortly before the start of Great Lent, each of the monks would receive a carton of milk. Arsenios decided not to drink his—instead, he gave it to an elderly monk named Nikita, who was in the first stages of tuberculosis. During Lent, Arsenios didn't chew his beans well, so that they would take more time to digest and sustain him a bit longer.

Little by little, his asceticism and reverence became apparent to the other fathers, and the priests came to prefer him as a chanter at the services they performed in the monastery chapels.

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54. A stall (in Greek, *stasidi*) is a fixed seat set in a row along the walls of the church. It is enclosed on the left and right and equipped with arm support for the believer to use when standing; otherwise, one may choose either of two seated positions, semi-standing and sitting. Such stalls are traditionally the only form of seating in an Orthodox church in Greece.—Trans.

Enduring the Pangs of Love for his Family

As if Arsenios's ascetic struggles and his monastic duties weren't enough, he also had to deal with the devil, who troubled him with various thoughts. In particular, he found Arsenios's sensitive spot: his great love for his family. "In the beginning," the Elder said, "the devil tormented me with recollections of my family. One moment he would bring to mind my mother, the next my other relatives. Sometimes, while I was sleeping, he would put before me images of the sick and suffering, or people who had reposed. When the monk in charge of our workloads saw that I was troubled, he asked me what was the matter. I then went to the abbot, confessed my thoughts, and found peace. It's painful at first for a monk to leave his little family and enter into the great family of Adam, of God."

Demonic Appearances

The devil didn't content himself to merely fight against Arsenios with thoughts, because they didn't dampen his struggling spirit. He went so far as to appear to Arsenios perceptibly. In other words, Arsenios saw the devil with his own eyes, and they spoke together. The tempter tried everything to scare him and make it harder for him to carry out his ascetic struggle. Apparently, from his long experience, the devil understood what would become of this beginner. But the novice Arsenios was neither frightened nor shaken by his presence. "Come back again," he said to the devil. "You do me some good—you help me remember God when I forget about Him, and you help me to pray."

Later, the Elder told this story to some of those around him. "How," he concluded, "could temptation stick around after that? He disappeared right away. He's not stupid enough to be the cause for a monk receiving a crown."

A monk who was listening asked him naively, "Elder, when you say 'temptation,' do you mean bad thoughts?"

"No!" he replied. "The tempter—get it? What thoughts?"

And so the spiritually agile novice Arsenios, in the words of Saint John of the Ladder, "contrived to outwit the cunning of the devils."[55]

A Rasophore* Monk

After the usual trial period, in 1954, on the twenty-seventh of March, Arsenios was tonsured a rasophore* monk. He received a cassock and the new name "Averkios." The Abbot had suggested that he receive the Great Schema, but he declined. "Even though I could have become a monk of the Great Schema right away—like they said, 'You've already served in the army, so there's nothing to stop you'—I said, 'Being a rasophore is enough.'"[56] Arsenios considered himself unworthy; but, also, because of his love of the hesychastic life, he didn't want to be hemmed in by the promises of the Great Schema.

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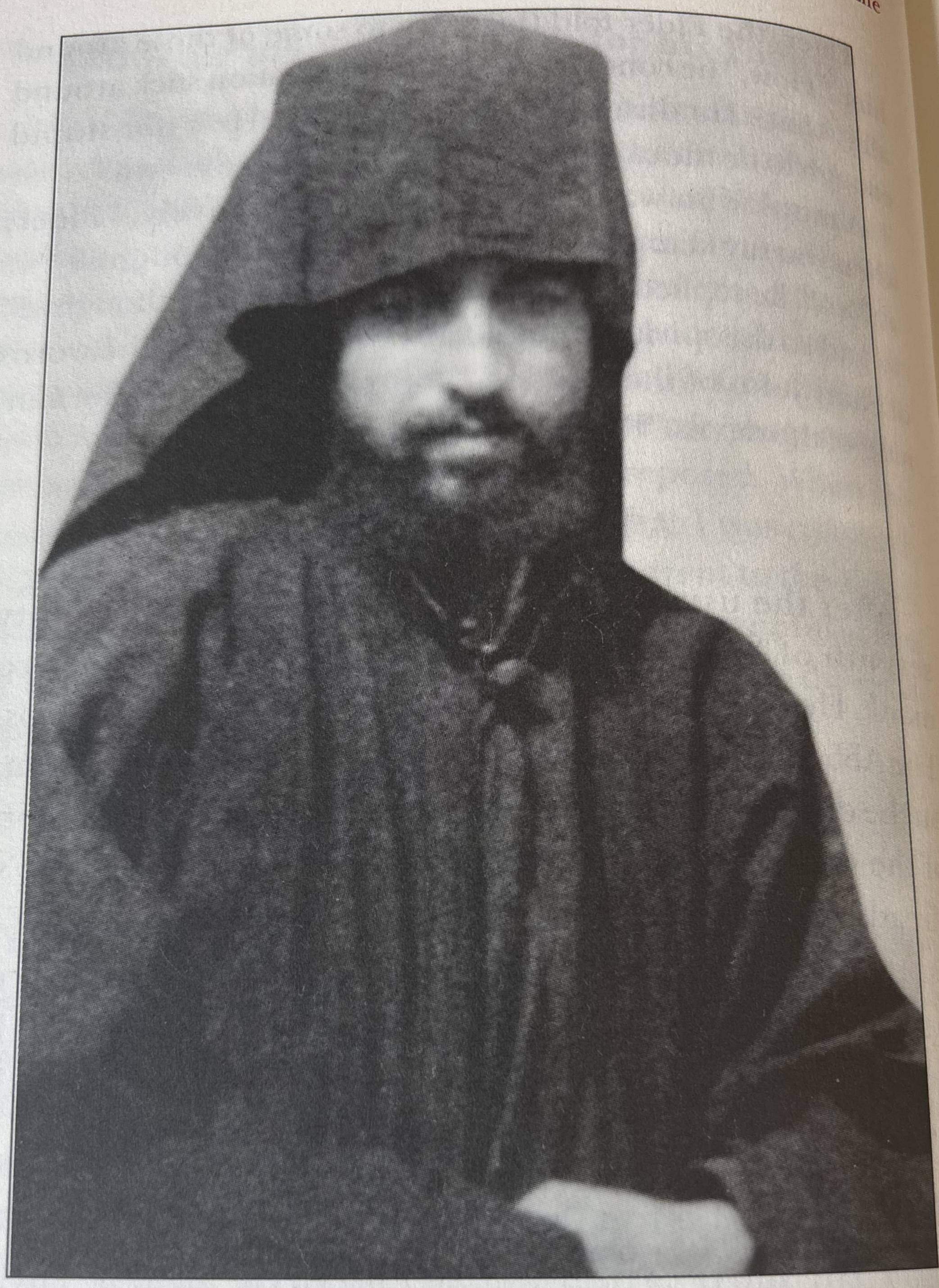
55. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 4.23, p. 28.

56. A monk cannot serve in the armed forces, and a monk who has received the Schema (unlike a rasophore monk, in some traditions) cannot leave monasticism. Arsenios, therefore, could not have been made a monk of the Great Schema before he had finished his period of mandatory military service. (The reason that the Small Schema is not mentioned here is that Esphigmenou was among the monasteries at which it was not considered an independent stage in monastic life.)—eds.



The Elder after his tonsure.

He sees the Lamb Thrashing

The Elder once related: It was my responsibility to help in

the Church as the ecclesiastikos*[57] during the vigils. Once, I was in the altar, watching as the priest prepared the holy oblation. Then something happened. At the words, "The Lamb of God is sacrificed," I saw the Lamb lying on the Holy Paten twisting and turning like a little lamb being slaughtered. After this, I didn't dare approach again! So it's clear that the mystery begins before [the start of the Liturgy service], even if some people maintain otherwise.

An Ever-vigilant Laborer

From then on, the new monk Averkios kept notes from his reading. Whatever he found helpful for his struggle he would copy in his notebook and try to put into practice. His interior, unseen struggle consisted of some study of the ascetical literature on practical issues; a great deal of attentiveness; unceasing prayer; and a determined effort toward purification from the passions as well as the acquisition of divine grace.

As he worked together with the other fathers and fulfilled his own duties, he made an effort to pray ceaselessly, working quickly and silently. Elder Gerasimos of Koutloumousiou*, one of his fellow monks, remembers: "When we would all work together on a common task, we would talk and laugh, but he wouldn't say anything. He worked off on his own and avoided conversing at length or judging. He was a very careful and conscientious monk."

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57. On Mount Athos, the ecclesiastikos serves a particular liturgical function as an assistant during the service, being responsible, for example, for the lighting of candles. – eds.

Once the monastery sent some fathers, among whom was Father Averkios, beyond the borders of the Holy Mountain in order to plant poplar trees in a field. Nearby there was a road on which many people passed by. Father Averkios forced himself, in his thoughts and with his eyes, not to see anyone. And so he was able to achieve something like the feat of Abba Isidore of Skete, who went to Alexandria and yet saw no one at all except for the archbishop, whom he had gone to meet.[58] Father Averkios's eyes were open only to the good examples of advanced fathers so that he would be edified.

Obedience unto Blood

"There was a brother at the monastery," the Elder recalled, "a carpenter, whom the fathers were obliged to accept because they didn't have a single woodworker even for the easy jobs, although they used to have seven carpenters at the monastery. They really needed him, so they cut him a lot of slack, and he let it go to his head. Then they made him a member of the abbot's council*, and after that he couldn't care less about anyone's opinion. Brothers would go to him so they could learn the trade, but none of them could stand him for more than a week. By the grace of God, I was able to stay on for two and a half years. I can't even tell you what I went through. But it was so beneficial for me!

"The continuously swearing and yelling carpenter couldn't see well. When he told me to do something that I could see was a mistake, something we would have to fix later

58. *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, p. 97.

on, if I dared to say anything he would yell, 'You still don't get it? You'll answer me in one of two ways: Bless or Let it be blessed!'[59] I kept my mouth shut. Things came out all wrong. We had to patch up the windows we made for the church. When the fathers asked questions, I didn't say anything. He was part of the monastery council, and he could have owned up to the truth if he had wanted to. In the meantime, I was able to put some money aside [spiritually speaking]. I would be spitting up blood [from being ill], and he would be yelling, 'What are you doing? Work! I don't care if you die working!'

"When my condition worsened, the doctor said I needed to stay two months in the monastery infirmary. The carpenter monk came to the infirmary and yelled at me, 'Get to work! There's nothing wrong with you.' I was obedient and set out for the mountain, where we would chop down chestnut trees and square off the wood. I didn't go by the road, but by a less travelled trail, so that the other fathers wouldn't see me and make trouble for the old monk. On the way there I started hemorrhaging, and I had to turn back. Afterward, he came to the hospital and asked me sternly, 'Why weren't you there?'

"I never harbored a bad thought about this brother. I figured that God was allowing this situation out of His love for me, so I could redeem myself for some sin. When I was in the world, God had given me the gift of being a good carpenter. People came to me even though I wasn't trying to

59. The former is a word meaning "bless", but used in the monastic context to ask forgiveness, and the latter is the typical reply of a Greek monastic upon receiving a directive. – Trans.

attract them, and other carpenters lost work because of me. Everyone was running to me, and meanwhile the family men weren't getting work. I didn't want that, so I would tell people, 'It'll be a long time—I have a lot of orders.' But they kept coming anyway. 'I'll wait,' they would say. So there I was paying off these sins. In the end, since I had gained so much from the brother, God worked things out for him. He went completely blind and was humbled before everyone, thus finding his salvation. He not only made me spit up blood; he also made me into a human being."

The holy fathers teach that obedience is equivalent to a confession of faith. For Father Averkios, obedience was indeed martyrdom unto the shedding of blood. And this obedience was not to the abbot, but to an older monk whose difficult character he patiently and joyfully endured.

When his supervisors saw that the windows were crooked and came to him to complain, he didn't justify himself by saying that that was how the other monk had told him to do it: he kept quiet and endured their unjust accusations as if it really were his fault. Later on, God in His goodness made the truth known. When his supervisors realized what had happened, they were in awe of the beginner's virtue.

When Father Averkios was in the hospital, a kind attendant gave him some walnuts and honey in order to strengthen him a little. Father Averkios was upset that he was confined to his bed and unable to help the fathers and brethren with their work. The aide told him, "You can help them more by praying [the Jesus Prayer] for them on your prayer-rope. God will strengthen the fathers and shower blessings on the monastery." Hearing that, his heart's honorable desire to do what is right led him to labor by

praying for all of the brethren.

When he had recovered a bit, the Abbot gave him a blessing to keep a small pot in his cell in order to drink some warm tea, which would help him to recuperate. When he went to the other fathers looking for a gas burner, he was quite moved to find that none of them had one. After he had, with difficulty, managed to make something hot to drink once or twice in his cell, his thoughts began to trouble him. And so he threw the burner (which was really no more than a tin can) into the sea from his window, and he placed his physical health and his entire self in the hands of God.

A Visit of Divine Grace

A new experience of divine grace soon came to sweeten the harshness of his asceticism. "When my batteries had died," reported the Elder – meaning that he had run out of energy – "I had an experience: One night, as I was standing there praying, I felt something come down from above and totally encompass me. I felt such joy and exultation as my eyes shed tears like water gushing from two faucets. I physically saw grace and felt it.[60] Before that, I had had many moving experiences, but this was the first time that something like this had happened to me. The experience was so intense and powerful that it supported me and kept me going for

60. As Saint Symeon the New Theologian writes, "The divinity; that is, divine grace as such, is not apparent on its own, if it does not enter into the rational soul. And just as sensible fire is not apparent to the senses if material is not found [to burn], noetic fire is not apparent to the powers of the nous when the material of the commandments of God is not present." (*Apanta ta Evriskomena Ascētica. [All His Ascetical Homilies in Existence.]*, p. 38 [in Greek]).

ten years, until, on Sinai, I experienced even greater states in a different way."

Departing for Stillness

When Father Averkios had come to the monastery, he had asked the Abbot to allow him to stay for a certain length of time, but then to give him a blessing to live in stillness, and the Abbot had agreed.[61] Without a doubt, he benefited greatly from all the fathers, and he had laid a good foundation at Esphigmenou, where he had engaged in so many struggles. But, even so, his longing for the hesychastic life only grew stronger. When he would pray, his nous would be taken up into divine vision. His heart was afire with "coals of the desert,"[62] and he felt the desert's call.

And so he received a blessing to depart from the monastery for the sake of stillness. He had given labors and service, blood and sweat, he went out with his hope in the Lord and the Mother of God, that they would "provide for him in the desert."[63]

First of all, he went to venerate the icon of the Portaitissa* at Iveron monastery. The Mother of God looked entirely different than she usually did! She had a very sweet expression on her face, and from this Father Averkios understood that his departure was in keeping with God's will.

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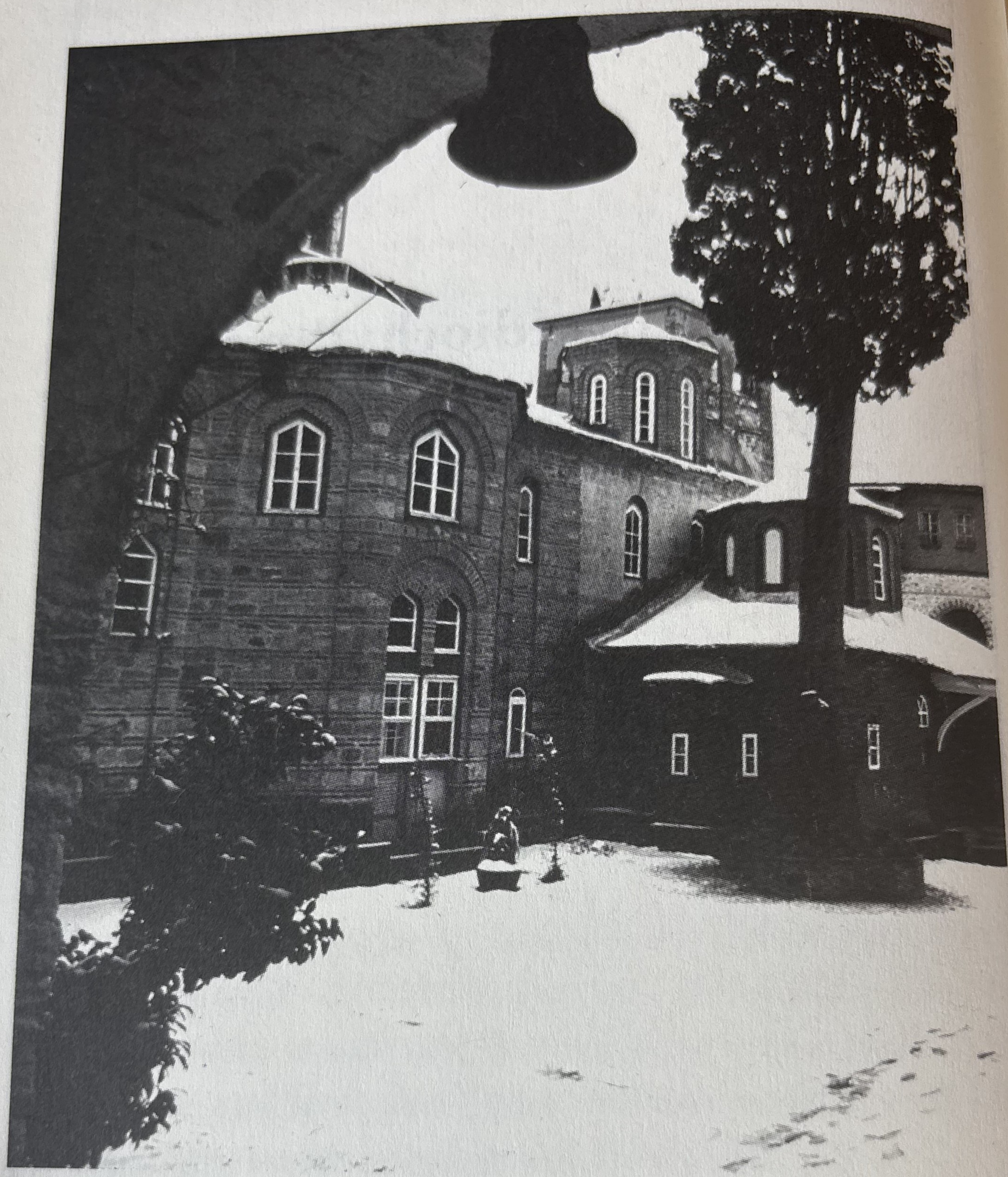
61. "In stillness" (literally, in *hēsychia*); that is, in solitude.—eds.

62. Ps. 119:4 (120:4).

63. Deut. 32:10. ["He provided for him in the desert, / In thirst of heat in a waterless place. / He encircled him; He instructed him; / He guarded him carefully as the apple of His eye."—eds.]

Life in the Idiorhythmic Monastery of Philotheou



An internal view of Filotheou Monastery.

As the Disciple of an Elder

At the Skete of Saint Panteleimon of the monastery of Koutloumousiou, in a hermitage named for the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple, a virtuous Elder named Papa-Cyril lived the ascetic life. Father Averkios had heard of his virtue, and it drew him to the Elder, so he went to ask Papa-Cyril to accept him as his disciple, which he did. They struggled together, and the Elder hoped that Father Averkios would stay permanently.

Once, while he was staying with Papa-Cyril, he asked his blessing to travel to Konitsa and bring his brother Luke back with him to become a monk.[64]

"He doesn't know how to get here on his own?" asked the Elder.

"He knows."

"So let him be. But, if he does come, you should help him and even give him your cell."

In accordance with his heart's desire, Father Averkios had

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64. According to the Elder, his younger brother Luke "was reverent and pure" and wanted to become a monk. He thought, however, that in order to become a monk it was necessary for him struggle in a super-human way and to live an extremely strict and ascetic life—as he had seen his brother, Father Averkios, doing from his days as a layman. This thought prevented him from becoming a monk, because he was sickly, and such self-denial was impossible for him.

found a holy Elder and a quiet little harbor that gave him peace—but the devil didn't stop creating trials for him. He had left Esphigmenou with the blessing of the abbot, but, since he was a useful carpenter, two or three months later the monastery's representative demanded that he return. If he didn't, the man threatened to have him expelled from Mount Athos. At that, Papa-Cyril asked Father Averkios if he had any relatives in one of the monasteries on the Holy Mountain. He did: a distant relative from his homeland named Papa-Symeon, who had actually met Saint Arsenios, was a monk at the monastery of Philotheou. So Papa-Cyril counseled him to go to Papa-Symeon for protection, since otherwise he would have trouble finding any peace.

Thus, Father Averkios, after a brief but blessed stay with the Elder,[65] was obedient and went to Philotheou*, which at that time was still idiorhythmic*, and from time to time he traveled by foot to see Papa-Cyril for guidance in the spiritual life.

Many times, Papa-Cyril would be informed by God both of Father Averkios's imminent arrival and of the issues that were on his mind. He himself never spoke: instead, he would provide an answer by showing Father Averkios a passage he had noted in a book. Later on, Elder Paisios recorded all the wonders he witnessed while with this holy man, who cast out demons, had the gift of foresight, and whose eyes, when he read the Gospel, would shed copious tears.[66]

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65. From March 22 to April 20, 1955.

66. *Athonite Fathers*, pp. 123–127.

Willing Disciple and Unseen Struggler

And so Father Averkios, who had so desired the hesychastic life, was obedient and ended up in an idiorhythmic monastery. There, he was put in charge of the pantry and the dining hall, which meant distributing food and wine to the fathers. Later, he was assigned work as a carpenter, and after that he was told to help knead dough. Although his duties were exhausting, he was always ready to sacrifice himself for others and to help wherever there was need.

A fellow monk, who knew him at the time, reports, "He had an outgoing personality with a smile on his face and an abundance of kindness. He was always ready to help anyone. We would often see him running, pliers and hammer in hand, to the fathers' cells in order to repair one thing or another. Once, when I had an argument with my Elder, he knew it. He took me to his cell, made me some coffee, and spoke with me for a while; and then he sent me to make a prostration to my Elder and be reconciled with him."

As an old hieromonk from Philotheou, who knew the Elder well, recalls, "His meekness, kindness, and peaceful character made an impression on all of the fathers at Philotheou. When he was head of the dining hall, he was distinguished by his swiftness when distributing the food. During his entire stay there, he never once had a misunderstanding with the other fathers. He brought peace to us all, affecting everyone with his way of life, his character, and his impeccable behavior toward the fathers. He was ready to help anyone and everyone. He would haul water and firewood for the elderly monks. Elder Evdokimos would point to him and say, 'Now he's a good monk.'

"He would also help Father Auxentios, the sickly guest-master. When he left Philotheou, Father Auxentios said, 'We've lost a blessed man of God.'

"We would see him only when he was working or in Church, where he read the Ninth Hour* and the Midnight Office*. He didn't have much give and take with people. He sat in his room and prayed. We heard that he often fasted and kept vigil. He was quite careful with his words. He didn't speak, except for the usual 'Bless.'"

Father Averkios was always present for the divine services of the monastery. And, out of sight in his cell, he engaged in great asceticism and tremendous prayer. His goal was to prepare as best he could for the desert, and the conditions of idiorhythmic monastic life enabled him to struggle ascetically without calling much attention to himself. "At the monastery," a fellow monk remembers, "he was an exemplary monk—a hard struggler and a great faster, who made prostrations like a machine gun shoots bullets."

"In my cell," recalled the Elder, "I used a chestnut log for a pillow and two wooden planks for my bed, with a gap in the middle so I wouldn't be warm. I always fasted until the ninth hour [that is, three in the afternoon]. I ate whatever vegetables were in season—tomatoes, lettuce, and cabbage—for a long time, until my body got sick of it and I didn't eat them with desire anymore. Every night I kept vigil. I didn't sleep much. In church, I didn't sit in the stalls, so I wouldn't fall asleep."

During the winter months, it snows often at Philotheou that is located at a high altitude and is quite cold. Nevertheless, as an ascetic endeavor, Father Averkios didn't light a fire in his cell. It was heated by the grace of God, Who pro-

tected him from severe illness—though he was constantly suffering from one sickness or another, such that he was never perfectly healthy.

Once, he was saddened to see one of the elderly monks locking up his supply of wood, thinking that someone would steal it. He considered it out of place for a monk to be suspicious. Father Averkios told him to leave the door unlocked and that he himself would bring him wood, or bring everyone wood, so that everyone would have some and no one would feel a need to steal.

A Proud Thought

"Even though," the Elder related, "I was reduced to skin and bones, like a skeleton, from my ascetic regimen, one night I felt a temptation—something like a woman's breath close to my ear. I immediately got up, started to chant and lit a candle. When I went to confession, my spiritual father [Papa-Symeon] said to me, 'There must be some hidden pride here. With so much ascetic struggle there's no reason for a temptation like that.' And, indeed, when the Elder examined himself, he found, he said, that "my thoughts were telling me sometimes that I was somebody, and, well, that I was doing something significant. Ah—lost time and effort!"

So Father Averkios would be humbled and purified of this hidden pride, his spiritual father told him to come to him every day to receive cooked food. Father Averkios himself didn't cook, while Papa-Symeon, who suffered from tuberculosis, was on a special diet. So, for one month, Father Averkios gave him his ration of food and received cooked food in exchange. The temptation passed, and he once again

began fasting, but now with greater humility and knowledge of self.

Annoyances from the Little Troublemaker

There was a period in the beginning of the Elder's struggles when the devil constantly brought blasphemous thoughts to his mind. He dug up all that Father Averkios had heard years before in the army, words to which he had then paid no attention. The devil paraded blasphemies before him when the time came for prayer, even during the services, and applied them to the memory of the Saints. So he confessed this to his spiritual father and went to the chapel of the Honorable Forerunner to pray. When he venerated the Saint's icon, he found that it gave off a sweet aroma, and he departed at peace. Later on the blasphemous thoughts returned. And so Father Averkios again went to the chapel and prayed, and a sweet fragrance came from the icon, as it had before.

Of course, the devil didn't stop with this. From time to time the Elder would hear knocking and yelling while sleeping but, when he woke, would see nothing. "Annoyances from the little troublemaker,"[67] he would say later.

One day, the Elder was in church, quietly following along with the those chanting the Trisagion Hymn during the Divine Liturgy: "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have

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67. The Elder liked to call the evil one *tangalaki*, an obscure word that he reported first hearing used by an old man from Pontus (an area in Asia Minor on the southern shore of the Black Sea). It refers to a bothersome, irritating person—a troublemaker. It is also a diminutive, hence "little." —Trans.

mercy on us." Then he saw the devil in the form of a fearsome beast enter the temple by way of the narthex. His head was that of a dog, his eyes and mouth hurled flames, and he made fun of the chanters, moving his head up and down and saying "Hol, hol, hol." He turned toward Father Averkios who was chanting "Holy God", and for that reason he made obnoxious gestures toward him.

He Devises a Way to Help

"At Philotheou," the Elder related once, "there was a monk, elder Spyridon, who acted [crazy,] like some fighter at the revolution.

"God sometimes allows monks, especially monks who have the Great Schema, to become possessed by a demon so they can be humbled and saved, and that's what happened to him. He tried to jump off the balcony and do other crazy things, so they took him to a doctor for an examination. The doctors got together and declared that only God would be able to heal him.

"One day I told him, 'I don't feel well: let's go to the priest and have him read a prayer over me.' In this way, I was able to get him to the priest to have the exorcism prayers read over him. I even asked the priest to read the prayers quietly so that he wouldn't hear, since if he did he would get up and leave. As soon as we arrived, I kneeled and said to him, 'Kneel down with me.' He stood there looking at me and said, 'If you don't feel well, it's not my fault.'

"Afterward he went through a lot. He broke his leg and was confined to his bed, and he was humbled, and then God took his spirit.

"One day when he was ill, he called for me to come and pray. So I said the prayer with the prayer-rope, making the sign of the Cross and saying, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on elder Spyridon.' And he said, 'Forget elder Spyridon—just say Spiro.' Before, if you didn't say 'elder Spyridon,' he would get offended. Afterward he was humbled. May God set everything aright for him."

In Konitsa for Healing

By this time, Father Averkios was suffering from his well-known health problems, which were getting worse. The elders of the monastery were concerned, so in the summer of 1956 they sent him to Konitsa for treatment. He didn't want to be admitted to the hospital so monasticism wouldn't get a bad name on his account, with people saying that monks ended up in sanatoria. With profound fidelity to his vow to live as a stranger to the world, he didn't stay at his family home, but at the chapel of Saint Barbara, with which he associated the asceticism and supranatural events of his youth. There, he would light a candle and spend his nights keeping vigil and making prostrations to the floor. Then by God's providence, Katie Patera, who had long since been working outside of Konitsa, came one day to light the lamps in front of the icons.

"It was summertime," she relates, "and I went to the chapel, where I found a very thin monk who reminded me of some venerable ascetic, with a countenance like Christ. I didn't recognize him at first. He had come to Konitsa for medical treatment, and he didn't want to stay at home because he said that monks should remain far from their rela-

tives. I suggested that he ought to stay at our house so my mother would have some company, since she was all alone and elderly.

"He bowed his head out of gratitude and came to our house. The fathers of his monastery had given him a little money, which he in turn gave to us.

"He stayed about three months. He began his treatment with streptomycin. A doctor from Konitsa came regularly to check his progress, and his sister administered the shots.

"He stayed in a room upstairs and spent his entire day reading, praying, and fasting. On the few days I had off from work and could stay home, I cooked him meals to strengthen him. I boiled meat, and then I took the broth and added lots of oil to it, so he wouldn't realize that it was broth from meat, and made a bowl of soup. He had a strong constitution, and within a short time his health improved. As soon as he saw that his belt felt tight on him and he had to loosen it, he stopped eating my soups and started boiling a little wheat on his own using his gas burner.

"One night my mother got up and heard a sort of recurrent pounding coming from the room where Father Averkios slept... She woke me up and sent me to see what the monk was doing. It was midnight. I knocked on his door, saying: 'Through the prayers of our holy fathers...' like he had taught me, then I opened the door, and he said to me, 'Ah, sister, what's the matter? Don't worry, I see what's happened. I didn't want to tell you—this is what I'm used to doing at night. I'm living a life that isn't monastic right now; but I still have to pray for people who've helped me.' Even though he was sick, he spent the entire night saying the [Jesus] prayer and making prostrations."

The Providence of God

"While I was on my way back to the Mountain," the Elder said, "a young woman in Ouranoupolis* came up to me and begged me to pray for her. Although she had decided to become a nun, her parents were against it. So with heartfelt pain, she left home without telling them anything and without taking anything with her.

"I set aside just enough cash for my ticket to Daphne* and figured that God would provide from there on. Then I gave her the rest of my money and my alarm clock, because I knew that it would be useful to her in the monastery she was headed to.

"As soon as I arrived in Daphne, one of the head monks from Philotheou called me over. 'I have the mules from the monastery here,' he said, 'Now, listen to me, put your things on them, and then get on yourself. It's a matter of obedience.'[68]

"I arrived at the monastery without feeling tired at all. That same night a monk came to me and said, 'Someone brought me an alarm clock. I already have one – maybe you don't. Take it.' I was overcome [with compunction] over God's providential love: His care for me in my wretchedness was so obvious and tangible."

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68. Until the early sixties there were not any cars or even dirt roads on Mount Athos. The mules were, and in certain areas still are, the only means of transportation. – eds.

The Small Schema

According to monastery records, Father Averkios had arrived on March 12, 1956. After a year of unseen struggle, he was tonsured into the Small Schema* on March 3, 1957 and given the new name Paisios, in honor of the indefatigable Metropolitan of Caesarea, Paisios II, whose native village was Farasa. His sponsor was elder Savas, a monk whom he honored and respected for being, as he put it, "virtuous, learned, and reverent." Father Paisios would correspond with him later on from Stomio, and he prayed that he would be worthy to receive the Great and Angelic Schema from his hands. The elder, in return, loved Father Paisios sincerely and counseled him as his own son.

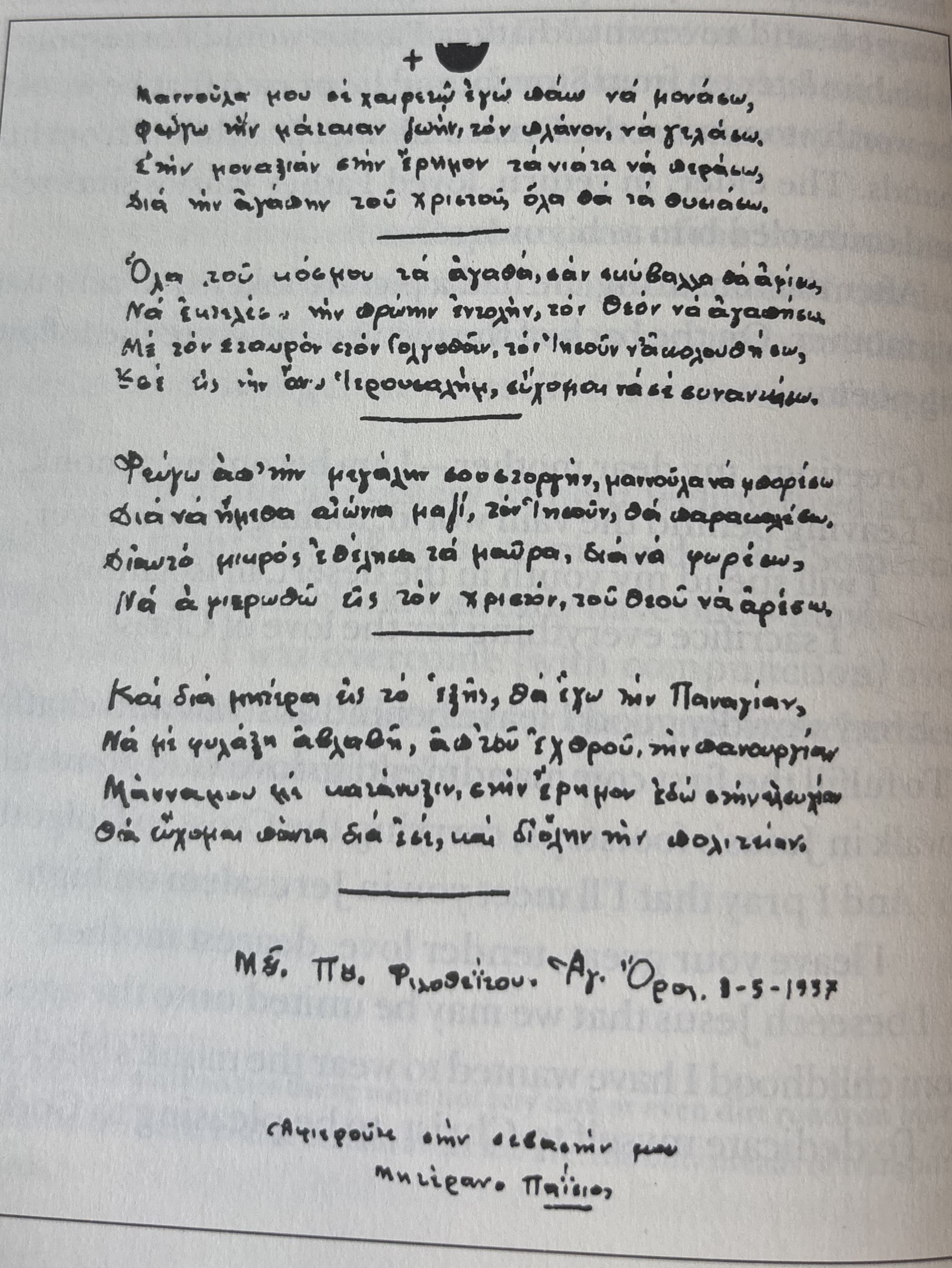
After the tonsuring, he had a picture taken and sent it to his mother. On the back of the picture, he wrote the following poem:

Greetings, my dear mother—I am becoming a monk,
Leaving behind the vain world, fooling the deceiver.
I will spend my youth in the desert, in isolation:
I sacrifice everything for the love of Christ.

Every worldly good I leave behind as straw and chaff,
To fulfill the first commandment: to love God above all.
I walk in Jesus's footsteps, carrying the Cross to Golgotha,
And I pray that I'll meet you in Jerusalem on high.
I leave your great, tender love, dearest mother,
I beseech Jesus that we may be united unto the ages.
From childhood I have wanted to wear the monk's black habit
To dedicate myself to Christ, to be pleasing to God.

And from now on I will have the Panagia as a mother,
To preserve me from the cunning of the enemy.
Dearest Mother, in the desert, in solemnity, in stillness,
I will always pray for you, and for the whole country.

Monk Paisios of Philotheou, Mount Athos, May 3, 1957
Offered to my honored mother. — Paisios



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Μαννούλα μου σὲ χαιρετῶ ἐγὼ θέλω νὰ μονάσω,
φεύγω τὴν κάλλιαν ζωήν, τὸν κόσμον, νὰ γελάσω.
Στὴν μοναξιὰν στὴν ἔρημον τὰ νιάτα νὰ περάσω,
διὰ τὴν ἀγάπην τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅλα θὰ τὰ θυσιάσω.

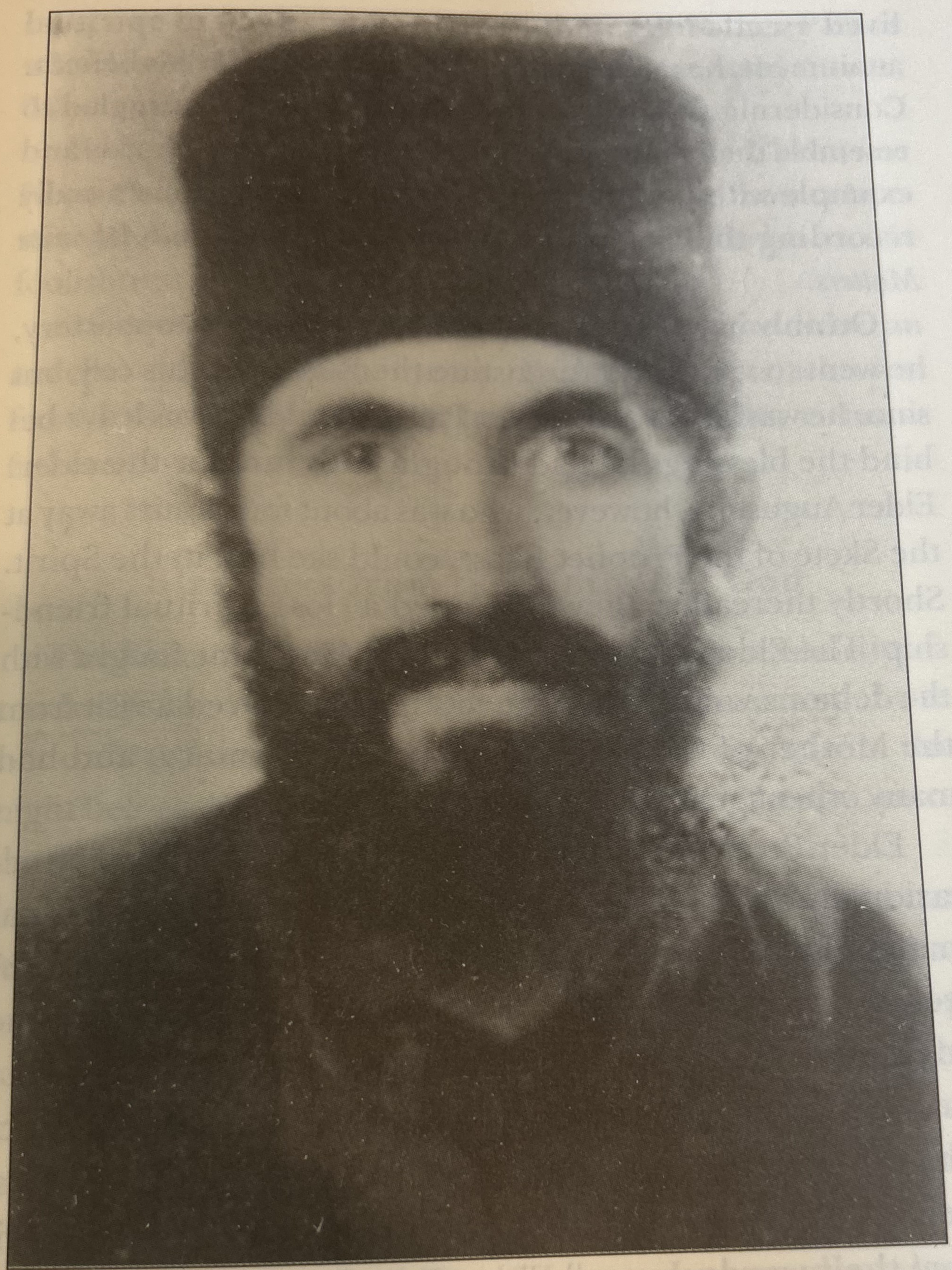
Ὅλα τοῦ κόσμου τὰ ἀγαθά, σὰν σύβαλα θὰ ἀρίσω,
Νὰ ἐπιτύχω τὴν φρώτην ἐντολήν, τὸν Θεὸν νὰ ἀγαπήσω
Μὲ τὸν σταυρὸν στὸν ὦμόν μου, τὸν Ἰησοῦν νὰ ἀκολουθήσω,
Καὶ εἰς τὴν ἄνω Ἱερουσαλήμ, εὔχομαι τὰ σὲ συναντήσω.

Φεύγω ἀπ' τὴν μεγάλην κοσμοχαρᾶν, μαννούλα νὰ φορέσω
Διὰ νὰ ἤμεθα αἰώνια μαζί, τὸν Ἰησοῦν, θὰ παρακαλέσω.
Δίπλωτο μιμπρός ἐθέλησα τὰ μαῦρα, διὰ νὰ φορέσω,
Νὰ ἀγιερωθῶ εἰς τὸν Χριστόν, τοῦ Θεοῦ νὰ ἀρέσω.

Καὶ διὰ μητέρα εἰς τὸ ἑξῆς, θὰ ἔχω τὴν Παναγίαν,
Νὰ μὲ φυλάξῃ ἀβλαβῆ, ἀπ' τοῦ ἐχθροῦ, τὴν πανουργίαν
Μάννακου μὲ παρακάλεσε, στὴν ἔρημον ἐδῶ σὲ ἡσυχίαν
Θὰ εὔχομαι πάντα διὰ σέ, καὶ δι' ὅλην τὴν πολιτείαν.

Μὲ. Πν. Φιλοθείτου. Ἅγ. Ὄρος. 3-5-1957

Ἀγιεροῦμε στὴν ἀγαπημένη μου
μητέρα. Παΐσιος



The Elder as a young monk.

His Association with Virtuous Fathers

Whenever Father Paisios heard of virtuous fathers who

lived ascetic lives and were at a high level of spiritual attainment, he made a point of visiting them for his benefit. Considering their counsels to be precious, he struggled to resemble them in their virtue. He guarded their words and example within himself as a priceless treasure, eventually recording them in his book *Athonite Fathers and Athonite Matters*.

On only his second day after his arrival at the monastery, he went to visit Elder Augustine the Russian in his cell, but since he was absent, all Father Paisios could do was leave behind the blessings he had brought with him for the elder. Elder Augustine, however, who was about four hours away at the Skete of the Prophet Elias*, could see him in the Spirit. Shortly thereafter, they developed a close spiritual friendship. The Elder later wrote that Elder Augustine fought with the demons, saw the Uncreated Light*, received a visit from the Mother of God in the monastery infirmary, and had many other spiritual experiences.[69]

Elder Peter, who they called "Petrakis," would come occasionally from Katounakia*, and would discuss spiritual matters[70] with Father Paisios who held him in the greatest esteem, revering him more than all of the other ascetics he knew, so much so that he wanted to become his disciple.

A fellow monk recalls, "It was as if all of the desert ascetics who came to the monastery went straight to Father Paisios. He would gather all of us younger monks together to benefit from their words. I recall Elder Peter's visits. He was a holy man, thin, short, with a little reed for a walking stick. When

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69. *Athonite Fathers*, pp. 93–100.

70. *Ibid* pp. 83–92. "Petrakis" is the diminutive of "Peter." – Trans.

he spoke of the Lord, he would stand up. Father Paisios would say to him, 'Please father, sit down.' He would answer, 'When we speak of the Lord, we must stand up.'"

He had also gained the respect of two fools for Christ, one from Philotheou, elder Dometios, and one from a hermitage, elder Elias.[71] Elder Elias would confide his ascetic foolishness and other labors to Father Paisios.

Of course, he stayed close to Papa-Cyril, as he did to an exceptional Romanian ascetic, Papa-Thanassis, who was from Lakkou Skete*. Later, he would meet other virtuous fathers.

Blessings from the Mother of God

The Elder related, "On the day of Dormition, shortly after the Divine Liturgy, my Elder sent me on an errand. I was not only exhausted from the fast and the vigil* from the night before, but also I didn't eat following the Liturgy, since the Elder didn't say anything about that."

"I made it to Iveron monastery and waited for the boat. Although it was scheduled to arrive at midday, night came and there was still no sign of it. I was totally spent. I told myself that I would say one prayer-rope to the Panagia and she would provide something for me. But then I thought, 'Come on, silly—you're going to bother the Panagia for this?' I hadn't even finished the thought, and here comes a brother from inside the port building. He gave me a small package and said to me: 'Here you are, brother, for the sake of the Lady Theotokos.'

71. His name has been changed.

"I opened it. Inside I found some bread, figs, and grapes. I could barely keep my tears back long enough for the brother to leave.

"This happened at the dock of Iveron. On another occasion, at the same place, he gained an even better sense of the Mother of God's loving-kindness through a similar, yet different event. On the second occasion he was, as before, without sleep and fasting as he waited for the boat to arrive.

"I was exhausted and because of that I didn't feel well. I was afraid that I would faint there and that the workers would see me. So I gathered my strength and went behind a stack of wood.

"At one point I thought about calling on the Panagia, but then I immediately said to myself, 'You bum! Is that what the Panagia's for—fetching people bread?'

"As soon as I said that, the Panagia came and gave me warm bread and grapes! Oh, from then on ..."[72]

Someone who the Elder had healed from an incurable disease, hearing his story, asked with amazement, "So, after you ate the grapes, Elder, were there pits left in your hand?"

"Pits and crumbs," he answered emphatically.

He Receives a Revelation

During his short stay at Philotheou, Father Paisios never stopped thinking of the desert. His yearning for stillness was now as intense as the "pangs of a woman in travail."[73] He

72. That is to say, from then on, the Elder had greater strength in the spiritual life.—eds.

73. Ps. 47:7 (48:6).

tried several times to leave for the desert, but all his attempts ended in failure. God's plan for him was clearly different, for the road toward stillness remained closed off by many obstacles.

For example, he once arranged for a boatman to come and take him to a deserted island so he could struggle there alone, but the boatman never came. Another time, he wanted to go to Katounakia and become a disciple of elder Peter, but the monastery elders wouldn't bless him to leave. In the meantime, elder Peter found his blessed repose. Looking back, the Elder exclaimed, "What I would have suffered! I would have been left alone and would have given myself over to asceticism without ever putting on the brakes. What the devil would have done to me!"

Yet another time he agreed with Father Photios[74] of Philotheou to go live the ascetic life together in Katounakia. Father Paisios was to do handiwork and Father Photios would distribute the product to the monasteries, receiving bread-rusks to live on in return. But one night, a little while before the talanton* was struck for Church, the Elder knocked on the door of Father Photios's cell and told him that it was not the will of God for them to leave. Father Photios's then told him of a dream he had had. "We were running on the rooftop of the monastery, ready to jump, when a woman wearing black grabbed us from behind and told us that it was a cliff and that we would be killed. That's how I also understood that God doesn't want us to go."

Father Paisios would eventually be led to the monastery of Stomio back in Konitsa, rather than to Katounakia. As he

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74. His name has been changed.

described the event, "While I was praying in my cell, I suddenly was completely immobilized. It was simply impossible to get up. I realized that something was happening by the fact that an invisible power was holding me stock-still. I stayed there as though I were glued to the ground for two or two-and-a-half hours. I could pray and think, but I couldn't move at all. In that condition, I saw, as though I was watching television, Katounakia on the one hand and the monastery of Stomio on the other. I turned my gaze longingly toward Katounakia. Then a voice—it was the Panagia's—said clearly, 'You will not go to Katounakia: you will go to the monastery of Stomio.'

"'Most-Holy Lady,' I replied, 'I asked you for the desert, and you are sending me out into the world?' Then I heard the same voice say to me sternly, 'You will go and meet with such-and-such a person, who will be of great help to you.'[75] At the same time—during this divine experience—I received answers to many of my questions as visibly as images on a television. After, I was freed in an instant from the invisible bonds and my heart was flooded with divine grace.

"Afterward I went and told my spiritual father. 'This is the will of God,' he told me. 'But don't tell anyone about it. Say that on account of health reasons'—I was losing blood at the time—'you'll have to leave Athos, and then go.' Later on, I wanted one thing, but God had His own plans it was obvious that the main reason was so that eighty families that had become Protestant would be assisted in returning to Orthodoxy."

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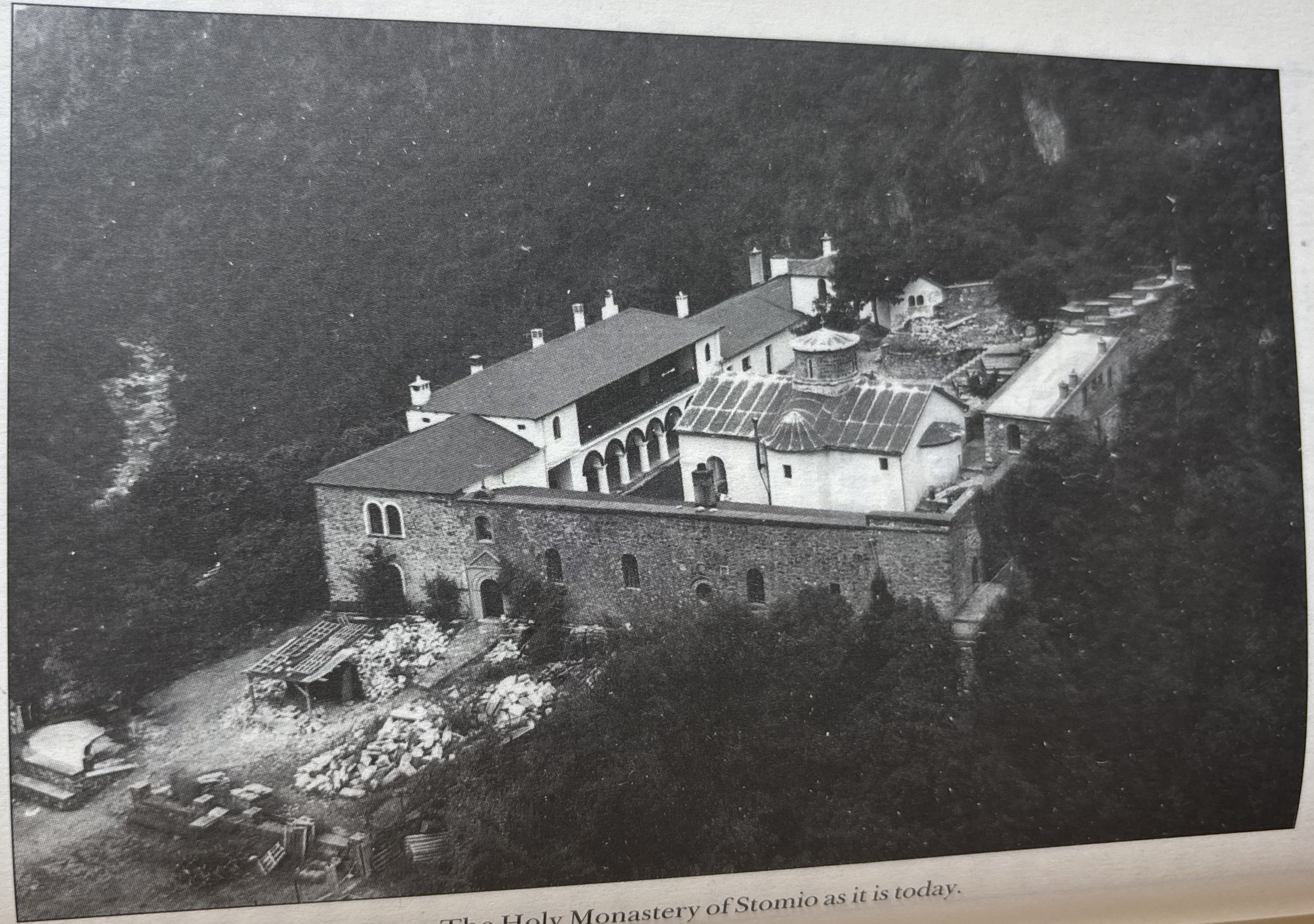
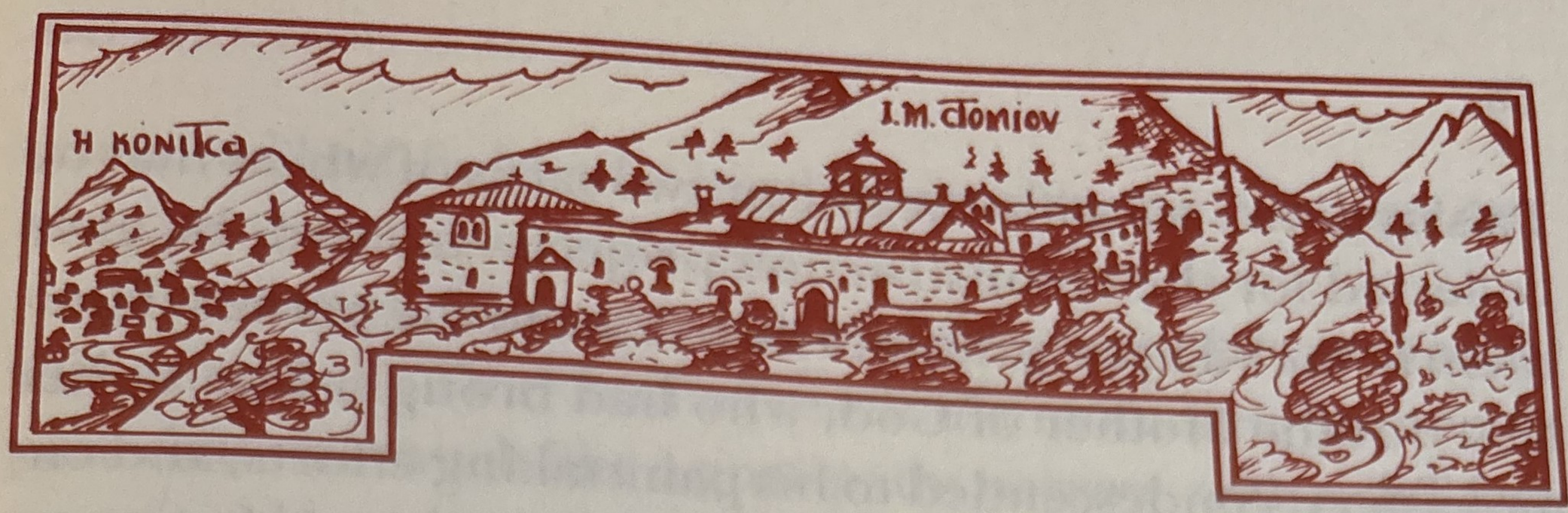
75. This was Katherine Roussis, mother of the mayor. "She was," in the Elder's words, "a holy soul."

At the Monastery of Stomio in Konitsa



The Holy Monastery of Stomio as it is today.



Rebuilding the Monastery

"By the Lord are the steps of a man rightly directed."[76] By revelation, the Lord now directed the steps of the man of God, Paisios, to the monastery of Stomio in the countryside of Konitsa. He had thirsted for life in the desert and prepared himself for it, but by the command of the Mother of God he found himself in a monastery in the world.

As he put it, "I did not expect the Panagia to ask me to fulfill the vow that I had made to rebuild her burnt-down monastery if she would protect me during the war. After all, I had become a monk, but it seems that she deemed otherwise."

This, then, is how the Elder found himself at the quiet monastery of Stomio in August of 1958. People there were very happy that he had arrived and many of them came frequently to see him.

Although the rebuilding of the monastery began without the necessary funding and material, eventually some faithful Christians offered their help. The bishop had told him to take the monastery's relics and visit villages in the area in order to collect donations from the people. And wherever he went the people, who were generally poor, would come, venerate the relics, and donate a bowl of wheat. But Father

76. Ps. 36:23 (37:23).

Paisios didn't set aside the one or two sacks of wheat that he collected for the reconstruction project—instead, he gave them to the villages' priests to distribute to the poorest families. But the Mother of God, who had brought him to her monastery, condescended to his painstaking efforts, and enlightened people to offer money, material, and their own labor.

The Elder sensed her close support and understanding many times. "When we built the concrete roof" he related, "seventy people came to help. As the work went on, the workers came to me and said, 'We're short twenty bags of cement.' Now what was I to do? I was in a difficult situation. On the one hand, we couldn't just leave it unfinished. On the other hand, it was hard to bring more cement, because the animals that they had in their fields would have had a four-and-a-half–hour haul. I ran to the Church, lit a candle, kneeled down, and begged the Panagia for help. Then I went and told the workers to keep working, mixing in the normal amount of cement. When they finished, there were five bags of cement left over!

"In the meantime, the women who were cooking had informed the Elder that they did not have enough bread and other food for all the workers. He calmed them down and told them not to worry in the least. And truly, 'they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken food that was left seven baskets'—as the workers left, they took some bread with them in their bags.[77]

"Throughout the whole day, dark clouds filled the sky, portending torrential rains. If it rained, the roof would have

77. Mark 8:8. New Testament quotations are from the King James Version.

remained half-finished. Shortly thereafter the sun came out and the work was completed.

"Finding and transporting building materials proved difficult as well. They had to reach the monastery by a footpath that was much like a goat-path: narrow, with a cliff-face on one side and a precipice on the other. At certain points, the path was so narrow that the loaded-down animals were hardly able to pass."

A worker described part of Father Paisios's labors: "Father Paisios had brought gravel up to the monastery from the river, and we used them to pour the cement. He collected the gravel, carrying some in bags on his back and some with the animals, which he found here and there, and that's how he managed to build the roof, even though he wiped himself out doing it."

George, a villager[78] relates the following: "Dr. Dakaris, a professor of archaeology, once paid the Elder a visit. He saw the Church, strewn with tiles, and he said to Father Paisios, 'I'll send you some white marble.' He did, in fact, send some, and he had it left by the bridge. The Elder let the villagers know about it so that they could haul it up to the monastery with their mules. They went and saw the marble, and they decided the pieces were too large for their mules, because they were afraid the animals would slip and fall off the cliff. The Elder simply replied, 'Okay,' and then he went down, loaded two slabs of marble on his back, and started ascending the path to the monastery.

"Some people saw him and asked, 'Father, what are you doing?'

78. George Maippas.

'Well,' he replied, 'since the people of Konitsa are afraid for their mules, I'll carry it up myself.'

"When those who were there heard this, they ran down to the village and said, 'What are you doing, sitting here drinking coffee, while Father Paisios is alone, carrying the marble on his back?'

"Their hearts were moved with generosity, so they brought their mules and carried it up to the monastery, and the floor of the Church was soon covered with white marble.

Father Paisios bought wood, and, on his own, he made doors, windows, church-stalls, tables, and whatever else they needed. He replaced the roof of the church, made cells for monks and a guest house, constructed a cistern, and made other improvements."

As his sister Christina describes that time, "The monastery was in ruins, and I went to help. When we first went, we loaded up a mule with a few things. Even though there was a room, a kitchen, and another room at the gatehouse, he made a little shack out of planks of wood, just big enough for him to sit in, though not to lay down. I said to him, 'Where are you going to sit in there? The mice will eat you alive.' He answered me, 'If anyone should come, he'll have a place to stay.' He returned the food I gave him. 'Take the food, because otherwise the mice will eat it.' He stayed there until another two fathers came, and he made three little cells. Later, in the corner, he made the cell he lived in."

A villager named Apostolos recalls,[79] "We visited the Elder at Stomio and saw the work he had done on the monastery. We stood in awe of his labors. He told us that the rush-

79. Apostolos Xadjiroubis.

ing stream below was hard to cross in the winter, and we offered our assistance. He built the mold for the bridge himself. Later eight people went to help him pour the cement."

Commanding Respect

The Elder did more than spend time and money on the monastery buildings. By his virtuous life and discerning counsel, he obliged pilgrims to show respect for the holiness of the monastery. He considered the parties, dancing, and other activities that would go on there to be not only inappropriate, but also blasphemous to God and insulting to the Mother of God, for the Church was dedicated to her nativity.[80] Thus, he did all that he could do in order to end such conduct.

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80. The Elder expressed his great love for the Monastery of Stomio, as well as his great pain for all that had taken place there, in the following poem:

Little monastery, solitary, nature's embellishment,
In reverence the forefathers built you,
And adorned you richly with offerings,
With monks and priests always guarding you.
And now, in our days, for you to be in ruins,
For your oil-lamp to go out so often –
Your solemn little church weeps sorrowfully,
The building burnt by the Germans has no consolation.
The Lady Panagia allowed that fire because of our sins,
For today we youth have gone astray.
We've left aside the songs of our heroes, our traditional dance,
And immersed ourselves in shameful Frankish music – woe to our darkness.
Lady Panagia, how do we not sense
That we should always celebrate the feast with vigil,
Not with shameful dances and loud music,
Cursing all that's holy outside your holy narthex?

– Monk Paisios of Philotheou

First of all, he dug a grave just outside of the entrance of the monastery on a little hill on the right. There, he placed a cross there, and every day he lit a candle and censed the area. He did this in order to cultivate the memory of death, but more than that he did it for the worldly people, so they would no longer come to entertain themselves there. And so the parties and dancing there came to an end.

Only on the feast day of the monastery did the Elder make an exception for them to go across the way and eat under the beach trees, where there was running water. Father Paisios had gotten the area ready for them, even putting up some boards to protect them from the cold. He had told them not to drink alcoholic beverages, but one of the villagers was disobedient and brought along ouzo[81] in a jug, which he sold to the others.

The Elder caught wind of it and asked the man, "What do you have there?"

"Water," he replied.

"The faucet's got water too," said Father Paisios—and with that he kicked the jug of ouzo, which was sitting near the end of the cliff, down into the Aoos River.

He set up two signs at an area below the monastery called Gabros, just before the small cement bridge. One sign pointed toward the monastery and read, "To the Holy monastery of Stomio, for the modestly dressed." The other sign pointed toward the river and read "To the River Aoos, for the immodestly dressed." In particular, he did not want immodestly dressed women at the monastery.

On the side-door of the altar he placed a sign that read:

81. A Greek liqueur.—Trans.

"Entrance is forbidden to the laity."

One Friday, a group visited the monastery. They took the monastery's frying pan, lit a fire right outside the monastery gate, and began to fry some fish they had brought along. The Elder didn't notice them at first, because he was working. But when he was informed of what was going on, he was enflamed with divine zeal. He went out, took the frying pan from them, and threw it and the fish into the ravine.

Leaping into the Chasm

Once, Father Paisios was carrying a reliquary in a harness strapped to his shoulders. At a place on the road called Megali Skala, the harness broke, and the reliquary fell off the cliff. The Elder, filled with love and respect for the holy relics, and without thinking of himself at all, instantly leapt into the chasm to try to prevent their fall. Nevertheless, the reliquary plummeted, tumbling down the rocks. By the grace of God, Father Paisios was kept completely safe—literally without a scratch. The reliquary and the holy relics it contained were also unharmed, though the metal donation box attached to the reliquary was badly dented from all the rocks it had hit on the way down. Indeed, the ravine was so steep, and so deep, that it was impossible for him to climb back up. He hiked along the river for a long time before finally finding a path.

Transferring the Relics of Saint Arsenios

It was during his time at Stomio that the Elder decided to recover the relics of Saint Arsenios and transfer them to

Konitsa. More than thirty years had passed since his repose, and he was still buried in the cemetery on Corfu. In October of 1958, Father Paisios left the monastery in the hands of his brother Raphael, and traveled there.

When he arrived, he sought out his old friend and fellow signalman Pantelis and found him working in a factory. Pantelis didn't recognize him. At his desk, with his head bent over his work, he asked, "What do you need, Father?" The Elder didn't reply. He asked again, "Can I help you with something?"

"With this," replied Father Paisios, holding out his thumbs. In that way, Pantelis recognized him; and, filled with joy and emotion at unexpectedly seeing his friend and rescuer, he embraced and greeted him.

They went to his house, and his wife and mother prepared a bountiful table and entreated the Elder to (as they put it) do them the favor of staying.

"Well, since I'll be doing you a favor," he replied, "you ought to do me a favor."

"Whatever you want." And, at that, Father Paisios asked that he might eat only some greens, on which he put a few drops of olive oil and two or three olives.

They slept in the same room. Three times that night, Father Paisios looked to see if Pantelis was sleeping, which he seemed to be, though in fact he was only pretending. Then he rose from bed, knelt, and prayed.

It was pouring rain the next morning when they started off for the cemetery. But the Elder said to Pantelis, "Don't worry—the rain will stop while we're on the road." And indeed, little by little, the rain eased up until it stopped completely.

As they removed the relics, the Elder cleaned the bones with wine and water,[82] wrapped them in clean, white pieces of cloth and placed them in a box-chest resembling a suitcase. He also found Saint Arsenios's belt buckle.[83] As they worked, the gravedigger protested at doing the job on a rainy day. And so the Elder, sensitive as he was to others—and even though he had the blessing of the bishop—said to Pantelis, "Since he's upset, let's leave two or three bones and we'll get them when I come back in a year."

After the relics had been removed, a ray of light shone through the cypress trees, lighting up the grave.

Afterward, Father Paisios went to a hotel. He didn't want to take the relics to Pantelis' house, because he was a newlywed, and the Elder was concerned not to upset the women, who might have disapproved of the bones being there.[84] When the two met the next morning, Pantelis saw that Fa-

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82. This was a traditional Greek custom when disinterring someone's remains. Disinterment of the reposed after several years is a common practice, owing to the lack of land available for permanent burial. The bones would be washed in the traditional fashion and transferred to an ossuary. (It is worth noting that this practice has the effect of allowing the discovery, sometimes quite unexpected, of remains that are incorrupt or have some other exceptional quality indicating the holiness of the reposed.)—eds.

83. At one point the Elder slipped and fell on Pantelis, who managed to catch himself, supporting himself against the wall with his hand. This spot on the wall would prove an important landmark for Pantelis: thirty-seven years later, it would help him remember where to direct Timothy, the blessed Metropolitan of Corfu, who was also seeking Saint Arsenios's grave. And so, on Saturday, August 8, 1995 (on the New Calendar), a second transfer of the Saint's relics took place, the Metropolitan having found Saint Arsenios's right foot and six of his vertebrae.

84. Many Greek women at that time considered it inappropriate for someone's remains to be placed in the home of a newlywed couple, because they felt that marriages and funerals were too dissimilar to permit it.—eds.

ther Paisios was transformed by divine grace. "You're looking well today ," he told him. "Really well!"

"Let me tell you," replied the Elder, "what happened to me last night. I went to open the box and venerate the relics, and a power resisted me, trying to strangle me. I said, 'Saint Arsenios, help me!' and I was freed immediately."[85]

He returned joyfully to Konitsa with the holy relics. He stayed the night in town at Katie Patera's house, where he set down the relics under the icon stand. Katie lit the oil lamp and started doing housework. Before long, she saw flashes of light shining from the room where the relics had been placed. Mistaking this for lightning, she thought it was going to rain; and, since she wanted to go down to Kato Konitsa for liturgy the next day, she hurried to go and get an umbrella. The Elder tried to explain to her that the flashes hadn't come from the sky—the weather was fair and the stars were out—but from the holy relics. "The light was strange," she testifies, "and it shone like lightening."

Labors, Ascetic Feats, and Stillness

The "little garden of the Panagia"—as the Elder liked to call Stomio, to bring to mind the Holy Mountain—had a wild, pristine beauty.[86] Even broadly traveled visitors have called it one of the most beautiful places on earth. But the

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85. This description of the recovery of the relics of Saint Arsenios is based on the testimony of Pantelis Tzekos, who would later become the monk Arsenios. Regarding the final incident, see Father Paisios's account in *Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian*, pp. 23–24.

86. The Holy Mountain is sometimes referred to as "The garden* of Panagia."—Trans.

living conditions were quite poor. The monastery didn't even have its own farm animals. Said the Elder later, "I had a lot of strength. A distance that normally took two hours to cover, I would make in forty-five minutes. I drank water, and it nourished me like food. Sometimes I would have to go from Stomio to Konitsa three to four times a day in order to get materials I would haul on my back to the burned-down monastery."

The great distances he covered, on foot, were a harsh and painful ascetic feat. And, yet, he drew joy from it, because he loved this labor.

Sometimes he would take off his shoes and walk barefoot along a rough path to the old monastery. He would pray there and, after two or three hours, return by way of the river-bed of the Aoos. When a young man once asked him why he did this, he replied, "I should have become a monk at a younger age than I did." That is, Father Paisios was adding to his asceticism to make up for what he would have done if he had become a monk earlier.

Although he "got mixed up with Martha's work,"[87] as he would refer to his building efforts, and helped people with their needs, he continued and even added to his ascetic struggles in spite of his deteriorated health. He fasted strictly and brought his fragile body into subjection, even while he was receiving injections as part of his treatment. Sometimes, his only sustenance during a twenty-four hour period would be a glass of water. And, although he cultivated many kinds of vegetables in the monastery garden, his usual food was tea with a bread-rusk or ground walnuts.

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87. See Luke 10:38–42. —eds.

A woman named Penelope describes his life at that time:[88] "He would walk barefoot in the garden, and in the evening he would remove the thorns from his feet. He would eat a piece of dry bread in the morning and another in the evening, occasionally drinking some plain tea. He worked very hard, but barely slept at all. He tried to never let anyone down, but to do what is necessary for others to be at rest and have peace of mind. He never said 'no.' His hands were covered with calluses from all of the prostrations he made. His legs had been reduced to bones. He had a lot of heath problems."

He worked hard during the day and kept vigil throughout the night. He read all of the divine services on his own, as he had learned on the Holy Mountain, never omitting anything from the monastic typicon*. He carried out his personal monastic rule with great strictness, in addition to praying the Jesus Prayer for the living and all the reposed, and for those who had some special need. He did not allow the dealings he had with people from necessity or the work of the monastery to extinguish his thirst for hesychastic life. On the contrary, it increased, and he thought of various ways to prevent his noetic prayer and communion with God from being interrupted. He longed to retreat to a quiet cave in order to pray without distraction and to seek after the God of his heart. That was his spiritual joy—to be alone in silence with God and to be nourished by the sweeteness of divine communion by means of his beloved noetic prayer.

Even though the monastery was located in an isolated and quiet place, the Elder would sometimes retreat to a

88. Penelope Barboutis.

nearby cave. He would go there at night and keep vigil, praying with his prayer-rope and making countless prostrations. But the cave was dark, and water trickled down from its ceiling, so he dug out another, facing the sun. It was like a little oven, and he could only fit into it by bending down. He hid its entrance with branches. Later on, he discovered the hollow of an oak tree. It was in a sunny and dry spot, and he wanted to carve out enough space for him to fit so that he could retreat to its silence in the winter, when the monastery was perpetually in the shade.

When there were no pilgrims, he would go to his cell to study, pray, and do other spiritual work on himself. He would leave the door of his cell slightly open so he could see the gate in case someone came, and after a few hours he would go back to his work. On days when pilgrims were visiting who needed his attention, he found ways to fulfill his spiritual duties discreetly. For example, when he had a lot of visitors, he would leave someone he knew to watch over the Church, and he would withdraw somewhere for a while to fulfill his monastic duties. When he went off to pray, he would always leave the door of the dining hall open, so passersby could help themselves to the bread, canned food, tomatoes, and other provisions.

Protector of the Poor and the Orphans

In addition to taking care of the monastery buildings, Father Paisios cared for all who were in need. And there were many: poverty, neglect, and misery were widespread throughout the villages surrounding Konitsa. The Elder collected clothing, money, food, and medicine, which he would

package and send to the needy. Many reverent women served as his co-workers in this charitable work. He sent as many as were willing to care for the helpless, and especially the elderly who had no relatives nearby to assist them.

He received permission from the authorities to place a donation box outside of the police station and in each neighborhood of Konitsa. He then assigned people to look after them, establishing a committee that was responsible for the donations, which would offer assistance to those in need. Father Paisios was also concerned for the poor and orphaned children, that they might complete their studies. He sent them to the appropriate people for help, but he himself also helped financially as much as he could. Later, many of these children would become learned professionals, for which they would credit the Elder.

The Elder made the monastery's fields available to poor families for cultivation, asking no rent. He only told them that, if they had a good crop, they could offer whatever they liked to the monastery. If the year didn't go well, he asked nothing of them. When his sister Christina brought him food or clothing, he refused to accept it, telling her to take it to families that he knew were needy.

On the Feast of Theophany, he would visit the villagers' homes with the sanctified water, and people would give a little something for the monastery. One Theophany, he visited the home of a family with a disabled child. The child's mother went to add something to the donation box, but the Elder told her, "The Panagia doesn't ask anything of you—you have your own needs." And, with that, he poured out all of the money he had collected up to that point onto their table.

As Katie recalls, "He was very compassionate and helped everyone a great deal. Once I gave him a knit sweater that I made for him, but when he later met a crazy woman on the street, he immediately took off the sweater and gave it to her so the poor woman wouldn't be cold. I gave him other things as well, but he gave each of them away to the first person he met."

"Every week," reports another witness,[89] "he would take food to an elderly man who lived alone, abandoned in a cave, and he would wash him with his own hands. He would set out from the monastery at the crack of dawn without anyone's knowledge." And a third witness[90] remembers that the Elder would regularly visit an older poor woman who lived alone in a shack, bringing her food.

Confronting Temptation as a Martyr

The Elder not only cared for people's material needs, but also was even more concerned about the salvation of their immortal souls. The Elder recounted a story from that time: "I asked about an old classmate of mine, and I found out that she had taken a bad direction in life. So I began praying that God would enlighten her to come visit me, so I could give her a word. I had gotten together some passages about repentance. One day, she came, with two or three other women. Afterwards, she began to visit regularly with her child, bringing candles and oil. Then someone said to me, 'Father, she's just putting on a big show. She acts one way

89. Thomas Tasios.

90. Lazaros Stergiou.

here, but she behaves differently in town with the police.' The next time she came, I gave her a bad scolding, and she left crying.

"Shortly thereafter, I felt my whole body burning with a strong carnal sensation. I went and prayed—nothing changed. I wondered, 'Why am I having this temptation?' I prayed, but again, there was no change. Then I took a hatchet, put my left calf against a piece of wood and the edge of the hatchet against my shin, and hit the back of the hatchet with a hammer. I cut off seven pieces of flesh, but I didn't feel a thing! The warfare was so strong that I didn't feel the pain, and it got worse by the hour. I had hoped the pain would douse the carnal fire, but nothing happened. My shoe was filled with blood, but the attack kept up just like before. Then I got up, left the monastery with the gate open, and headed for the forest. 'It is better for the bears to eat me, than ...,' I said to myself.

"On the road I got tired, and I collapsed on the side of the path, exhausted. I thought about why I was having this temptation—I tried to find the cause, to come up with some kind of explanation. Then, suddenly, the woman I had rebuked came to mind, and I thought, 'My God, if she's felt carnal warfare like *this*, how could the poor woman take it?' That was it! I repented for my strict attitude toward her and asked forgiveness from God, and right away I felt like I had just gotten out of a cool bath. The carnal feeling was totally gone."

In conclusion, the Elder added, "When we suffer from a carnal temptation it's not always the flesh that's at fault. Carnal warfare can also come from judgmental and proud thoughts. First, we have to find the cause of the temptation,

and then act appropriately. We shouldn't immediately start fasting, keeping vigil, and so on."

This incident illustrates the Elder's martyric mindset well. He preferred to die, to become food for wild animals, rather than sin even in thought. He truly gave blood to receive the Spirit. Actions such as the Elder's are not unheard of in the lives of the Saints. For instance, it is written that Abba Pachon, when he was tempted, went to a hyena's den and later held a poisonous snake against his skin. God protected him and granted him the gift of dispassion.[91]

The marks of the hatchet cuts were visible on his leg until his repose. Those who heard the Elder narrate the story are witnesses to this trial, for they also saw and touched his scars.

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91. *Lausaic History*, pp. 82–83. ["I suspected that God had abandoned me, and I felt so oppressed that I made up my mind to die in an irrational way rather than give in to bodily passion. I went out then, and while going about in the desert, I came across a hyena's cave. Here I placed myself naked one day in hopes that the wild beasts would devour me." And, later: "Faint of heart and in despair, I went away into the Great Desert. I found a small asp, picked it up, and put it to myself, so that I might die being bitten in this fashion. Then I ground the head of the reptile into myself as being responsible for my temptation, but I was not bitten." Upon this, he reports, "I heard a voice saying in my thoughts, 'Depart, Pachon! Keep up the fight! It was for this reason that I let you be depressed, so that you might not become haughty as a strong person ...' Afterward, he returns to his cell: "fully satisfied ... I settled down confidently, worrying no more about the struggle, but dwelling in peace the rest of my days."

Elder Paisios, in his book *Athonite Fathers and Athonite Matters*, relates a similar event in the life of the modern holy elder, Augustine the Russian (pp. 93–94). The act of seeking death for the sake of chastity has an established history in the Church. Regarding patristic teaching about such deeds, and their relationship to martyrdom, see note 9 on p. 6 "The frontier of Farasa". – eds.]

Anti-Heretical Struggles

When the Elder arrived in Stomio, a heretical group of Evangelicals as dangerous as a hornet's nest was already present, trying to convert the local people. They had their own meeting hall and were gaining members all the time.

God used Father Paisios to drive out the Protestant delusion, for even though he was uneducated, he was "full of grace and power"[92] and had a refined sense of the Orthodox faith. To begin with, he learned what these wolf-like missionaries believed. Then he wrote an article explaining who these Evangelicals were, and he posted it at the monastery for pilgrims to read. When the missionaries held gatherings, he would send one of his own to see which Orthodox had attended, and then he would invite them individually to see him. He would admonish those who did come to him—and they would never again attend a heretical gathering. He even hired some of them on as laborers at the monastery and convinced them to end their relationship with the heretical group. Later, they would become models of the Christian life.

He also gave a "blessing" for a group of young people to go one night and remove the sign outside the missionaries' meeting hall. He held a discussion with the leader of the group, who had come from Thessaloniki, in which he convinced him to never return to Konitsa. Through his prayers and his active, discerning approach to the situation, he was able to turn back everyone who had been drawn away by the Evangelicals. And so Konitsa once again had "one fold

92. Acts 6:8.

and one shepherd."[93]

Later on followers of Apostolos Makrakis arrived there, but the Elder prevented them from making any headway.[94] He responded quickly and decisively by informing people who didn't know about Makrakis. Soon, they too left empty-handed.

Father Paisios also demonstrated his concern for the spiritual enlightenment of the Muslims living in Konitsa. He showed them his care and love, helping them with their needs and gathering them together in one of their homes each Friday to discuss various matters of interest. He hoped that if he approached them in an appropriate way and with love, they would become Christians. And, in fact, some of them eventually asked to be baptized.

Led by the Holy Spirit

The Elder recounted: "Two monks came to Stomio to stay with me. I had one large cell and wanted to divide it in half, but since I didn't have the money, I decided to borrow five hundred drachmas.

"In the morning, I took to the road and encountered a small roadside shrine, so I made the sign of the Cross, lit the oil lamp and went on my way. Soon, I passed a house, and something nudged me to knock on the door. The man of

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93. John 10:16.

94. Apostolos Makrakis (1831–1905) was a controversial philosopher and theologian whose teachings were condemned as heretical by the Church of Greece. He considered himself to have finished the work of philosophy, and he collected followers who promulgated his teachings with fanatical zeal for decades after his death.—eds.

the house was happy to see me. 'I wanted to see you,' he said. 'I've pledged this to the Panagia.' And then he handed me five hundred drachmas—just what I needed.[95]

"Another time, with this incident still in my mind, I felt a similar internal impulse—something nudged me from within—to go to a big city, [Ioannina]. I couldn't refrain from going, so I obeyed and headed off. I didn't know what I was going to do there—I didn't have any particular reason for going. Walking down the street, I passed a store, and I went inside and bought a few oil lamps for the church so I would have some spares. A little while after that I arrived in front of a house on a side-street, and the same interior force as before pushed me to go in. I obeyed and knocked on the door. A forty-five-year-old woman dressed in black opened the door. As soon as she saw me she fell at my feet and for fifteen minutes she shouted over and over, 'My Jesus, thank you—thank you, my Jesus!'

"We went inside, where there were two other women, and from eleven in the morning until five in the afternoon we sat and talked. Then we said the Service of Supplication to the Theotokos. She kneeled and chanted the service by heart with tears.

"She had been widowed at a young age. She was very wealthy. She had given part of her money to orphaned girls, in the care of their relatives, and she was waiting for an opportunity to properly give away the rest of her money and go to a monastery. In the meantime, she had gone to Jerusalem and secretly become a monastic. She wore black clothing,

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95. In 1960 five hundred drachmas were equivalent to approximately $17. A worker's daily wage was 50 drachmas.—eds.

like the kind nuns wear, and she had been entreating God to send her some monastic to teach her this way of life. Later on, after she had given her money away, she left for a monastery on one of the islands.[96]

"She also told me that there was another secret monastic working at a newspaper stand. I went to meet her afterward. This woman had taken on the responsibility of raising her brother's orphaned children, who had lost their mother. Often, her nous would be caught up into heaven in divine vision! Her customers couldn't understand her state. They thought she was really upset, and that she had lost it a little. They would take what they wanted on their own and leave her the money. Both of those women were elect souls."

Demonic Attacks

Father Paisios had heard that previous fathers of his monastery had lowered themselves into the gorge to find peace and quiet, and he tried to do the same. Using a rope, he tied one end to himself and the other end to a tree. As he descended, he found a level surface a few square feet wide, and he stopped there to pray for a time. Taking some rocks, he put them around the edge to make a low wall. But, as soon as he started to pray, the enemy came at him like a whirlwind, a strong current of air pushing him toward the edge of the precipice. The ravine was truly frightening—

96. The woman, known in the world as Athena Hadji, departed for a monastery named Faneromeni Salaminos, where she struggled and reposed as the nun Sister Anna. She was known for her great service to the nation during the years of the German occupation in the Second World War.

people would be seized with fear just from looking down into it. Father Paisios called out to the Mother of God: "My Lady, save me!" and the whirlwind stopped immediately. He was saved right at the edge, where he had been bracing his feet against the rocks.

The Elder also described another demonic attack: "I was in the church, praying, and at around midnight I heard something continuously fooling around with the door handles. One o'clock came and it hadn't stopped: you could hear things knocking around and the sound of voices. There was no one else in the monastery. So, I thought to myself, 'Since the devil's at the door, I shouldn't go out,' and I went into the altar area and stayed there until morning."

Saved by Divine Providence

"Once, while I was fixing up the monastery," the Elder said, "I had to leave immediately to get some materials that were about two hours away. On the way, at a difficult point in the road that I used to call Golgotha, I met an acquaintance of mine who had three donkeys loaded down with wood. Their packsaddles had flipped around, and one of the donkeys was close to the edge of the cliff and was in danger of falling.

"I thought to myself, 'If I go and help, I'll be late,' but my conscience wouldn't let me ignore him, so I went. 'God sent you, Father,' he said. I helped him to unload and reload the wood, and then I kept going. I had been slowed down by about twenty minutes.

"Back on the road, I saw that there had been an avalanche about three hundred yards ahead. They told me when it had

happened, and I calculated that, if I hadn't stopped to help that man, I would have been there at the exact time of the avalanche—I wouldn't have had a chance. Everything happened according to the providence of God. God allowed the man to run into trouble in order to save me. I had been saved from certain death. He had told me 'thank you' a thousand times. Now I turned around and shouted to him from a distance, 'Anastasi, you saved me—God sent you!'"

A Night-time Visit from the Mother of God

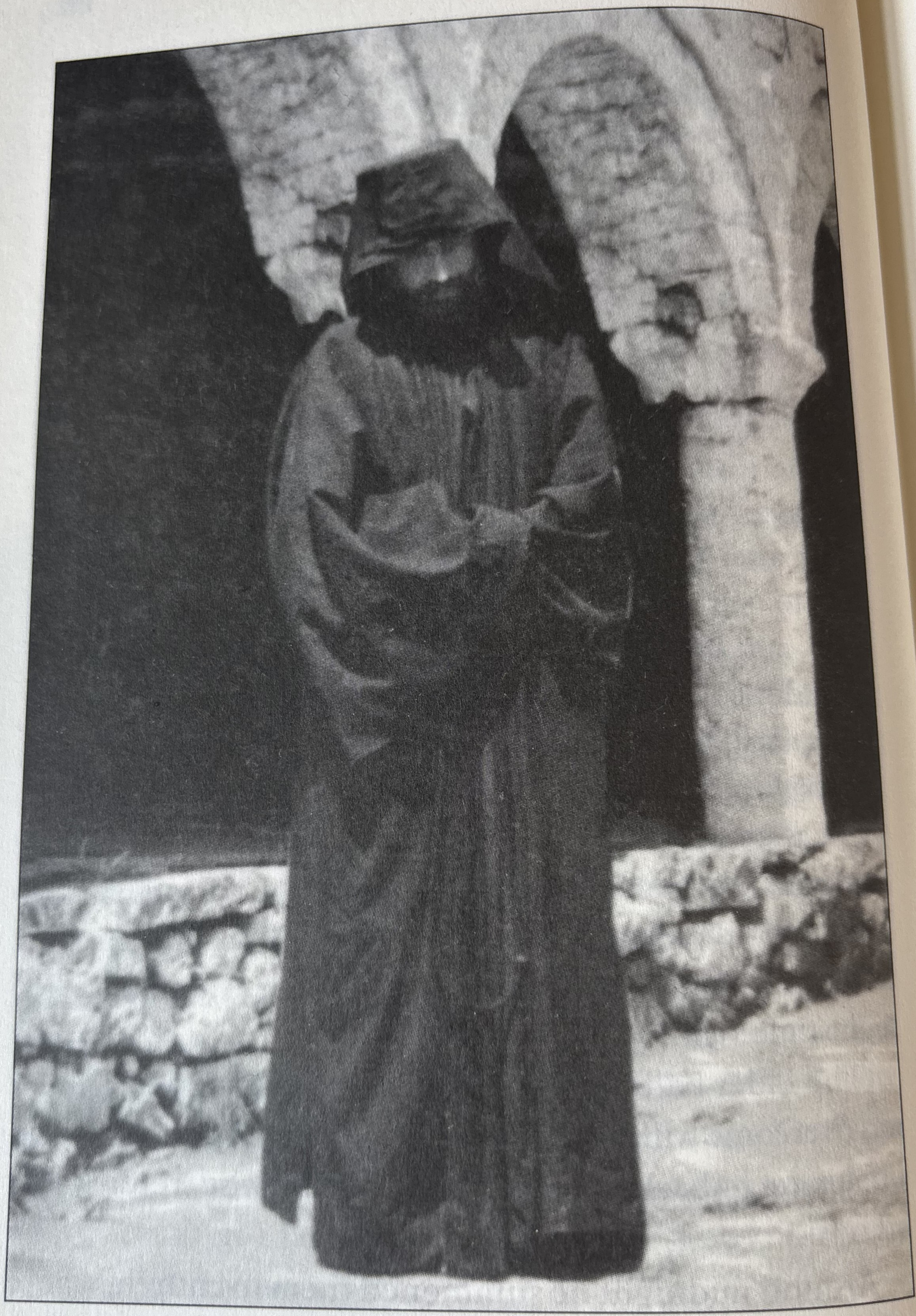
There were two reverent women from Konitsa, Popi and Penelope, who would come and help with the garden.[97] One night, after Compline, they retired to the guest house and went to bed early. They awoke to the sound of the semantron*, and they headed out of the room. But then they saw the Elder coming out of his cell, and he said to them, "Dear ladies, didn't I tell you not to hit the semantron at night?"

Perplexed, they replied that they hadn't. At that very moment, they beheld a woman entering the church. They saw her from the side, and only from the shoulder down—her hand and her robe. It was the Mother of God, and the mysterious striking of the semantron had been to announce her night-time visit.

The Elder had been speaking loudly, but at this sight he was overcome with awe and reverence and motioned for the women to go back to their room. He, likewise, returned to his cell.

Around midnight he summoned them to church, where

97. Popi Mourelatou and Penelope Barboutis.



The Elder at the Holy Monastery of Stomio.

they prayed the Service of Supplication to the Mother of God. "God judged you worthy to see the Panagia," he told them, "but you can't tell anyone about it".

A Deceptively Attractive Demonic vision

"One night," the Elder related, "as I was sitting on my stool in my cell saying the Jesus prayer, I suddenly heard music outside – drums and fiddles, voices and the sounds of people dancing. I got up to see what was happening, and I found nothing: total silence. I knew it was the devil's work."

"I had barely sat back down on my stool to continue praying, when my cell was suddenly filled with a bright light. The roof disappeared and the light reached up to heaven. At the top of this pillar of light seemed to be the face of a fair-haired young man who resembled Christ. You could see about half of his face. There was also a bright inscription that read 'Glory to God in the highest.' I stood and looked up to get a better view of the face, and I heard a voice say, 'You've been accounted worthy to see Christ!'

"Immediately, I looked down to see where I could stand to see the face better, and I thought: 'Who am I – the unworthy – to see Christ?' At that instant the light vanished, and the so-called vision of Christ too, and I saw the roof back in its place.

The devil had failed to delude Father Paisios with a false vision – but in revenge he attacked him, scratching up his legs so much that they started bleeding.

Because of this experience, the Elder would later give the following counsel regarding visions: "That's how delusion begins. If the Lord hadn't helped me to see that it was de-

monic, afterward I would have been watching the evil one's television shows. 'Look, there's Christ, the Panagia, the prophets, and so on. That's why we mustn't accept visions easily, even if they're from God. [When we're cautious like this, even if a vision really is from God,] He rejoices, you might say, because we're demonstrating humility and caution, which He wants us to have. He knows how to show us what He wants to and teach us in some other way."

Closeness to Wild Animals

The great love of the Elder for God and for His image, man, flooded his heart and overflowed to include even the irrational creatures. He especially loved wild animals, and they, feeling his love, would come to him freely.

A deer often came and ate out of his hands. He made the sign of the Cross on his forehead using dye, and told the local hunters to stay away from the monastery and to watch out for the deer with the mark. If they came across it, he said, they weren't to shoot at it. Unfortunately, one day a hunter found the deer and, ignoring the Elder's instructions, killed it. The Elder was greatly saddened, and he made a prophecy about the man which turned out to be true down to the last detail.[98]

The forest surrounding the monastery was inhabited by bears. The Elder once came across one as he was ascending a narrow path to the monastery with a loaded donkey. The bear moved to one side so the Elder could pass. The Elder, in

98. Since the person in question is still alive at the time of this writing, the prophecy will not be described here, out of respect for his privacy.

response, motioned for the bear to pass first. "Then she reached out her hand," he told us, "and grabbed mine to tell me to go ahead." Then he told the bear, "Don't show up down here tomorrow, because I'm expecting guests. If you do, I'll take you by the ear and tie you up in the stable."

The Elder said that bears are vain: when they're in danger they pretend they're not afraid, but then they take off running.

There was one bear that had grown familiar with Father Paisios and came to him often. Father Paisios would feed it, but he told it that when the monastery had visitors it shouldn't come down, because it would scare them. The bear didn't always follow his instructions though, and sometimes it would suddenly appear at the monastery, frightening everyone. Many people saw the bear, including Katie Patera. "One night," recalls Katie, "I went up to the monastery with a flashlight to make it in time for Divine Liturgy. Hearing a noise, I turned the light toward it, and I saw an animal that looked like a large dog. It followed me, and when I arrived I asked Father Paisios if the dog belonged to the monastery. He said, 'Are you sure it's a dog? Look again—that's a bear.'"

Other Incidents at Stomio

Once, Penelope was robbed of five hundred and fifty drachmas, which was all she had to her name. Distraught, she immediately went up to the monastery to tell the Elder. He was waiting for her out in front near the mulberry tree, and while she was still far away he called out, "Don't worry, it'll turn up. Five hundred drachmas, right? You'll find it in fifteen days." Thirteen days later, she saw the Elder and told

him that she still didn't have the money. "Dear woman," he answered her, "didn't I say in fifteen days? Why are you being impatient?" And, indeed, on the fifteenth day the thief's mother came to return the money.

On those Sundays when Divine Liturgy was not served at the monastery, Father Paisios would go down into Konitsa to attend Liturgy and to receive communion. He would close the monastery at around midnight and reach the village within an hour. Once there, he would wait for six or seven hours inside the ossuary, where he would pray for the living and the dead until the warden would come to unlock the Church.

On one such night, he saw light emanating from the bones. This, perhaps, was sign to him that the souls of the reposed felt the effects of his prayer.

"One Saturday," recalls a former worker at the monastery,[99] "I was out preparing the wall to pour concrete, and Father Paisios was cleaning the Church. Around eleven in the morning he motioned to me as though he wanted to tell me something. Lunchtime came, and we went to eat, but the Elder didn't speak—he had lost his voice. I asked him, 'Father, what happened to you?' He was perfectly calm, like nothing was wrong. 'I'll go get a doctor,' I told him, but he refused. We communicated with signs and gestures. The following Saturday, I heard him chanting while he was washing the oil lamps. Then he came out carrying the icon of the Panagia. I was so happy [to see him well], I went over and

99. Lazarus Stergiou.

embraced him."

Penelope had been making trips to the monastery during the same period. When she had seen that he couldn't speak, she would start to cry. Afterward, when he recovered his voice, she asked him what had happened. The Elder told her that he had once suffered the same thing when he was on the Holy Mountain. After this incident, God told him that it wouldn't happen again, and it didn't.

Katie recalls another incident from that time: "The Elder once came to Saint George village, when I had fixed up the house for him to see my mother. A little eight year old boy named Stephen, had fallen from the top floor of his house and hit his head on the cement. His head had cracked open and blood was gushing out like a river. His mother and grandmother, along with just about everyone, didn't know what to do and were screaming.

"'Why are you all acting like that?' asked the Elder. He went to the boy, took out a cross, used it to make the sign of the Cross over him, and asked for cotton to put on his wound. The boy never needed to see a doctor, and there was no scar!"

Once, he was very late returning to the monastery from Konitsa, where he had been catechizing Muslims in the Faith. So as not to skip vespers, as he ascended to the monastery in the middle of the night, he said the Jesus prayer on his prayer-rope for as long as the service would have lasted. At one point, demons grabbed the prayer-rope out of his hand. He stayed where he was, kneeling and praying. "I won't leave this spot," he said, "If you don't give me back my prayer-rope." Forced by the power of prayer,

they soon returned it!

The mayor of the city and some city officials once visited the monastery. Father Paisios didn't make any attempt to flatter them so that they would come to like him and help the monastery—it wasn't his way to impress people with flattery. For example, when he gave everyone a treat, he didn't start with the mayor but with Uncle George, a simple and reverent old man from the village, because he was the most worthy of respect. As Saint John Chrysostom taught, the honor of the human being is virtue.[100] Although Father Paisios showed respect to people who held positions of distinction, in this case he respected honor born of virtue before honor attached to position.

Another villager from Konitsa[101] relates the following: "I once met the Elder at the bus station in Ioannina, and we traveled together. During our bus trip, a four-car pile-up happened right in front of us: three buses and a truck slammed into some electrical poles. But we weren't harmed—it was like an invisible power lifted our bus five or six yards into the air. I turned to the Elder and said, 'If you weren't here, Father Paisios, we would've become pillars of salt.' He replied, 'Did you see anyone make the sign of the Cross? When you get on the bus, say your prayers so everything will go well.'"

"When he had a headache," recalls Penelope, "he would

100. *Commentary to Psalm 48*, PG 55, 232.

101. Thomas Tasios.

lay his head on the icon of the Panagia and his pain would be relieved.

"He would knead prosphora* without yeast, make the sign of the Cross over it, and it would rise.

"One day he said to me, 'Three hunters are coming—cook some beans for them.' They did come and they asked for beans to eat. They had meat in their bags, but they hung it on a tree outside, because the Elder didn't let people grill meat in the monastery."

The Elder knew a laywoman in Ioannina who had the gift of clairvoyance. Once, he wanted to buy some glass shades for his oil lamps, but he was short thirteen drachmas. As he passed the woman's house, he heard her say to someone, "Give the father thirteen drachmas so he can buy some glass shades for his oil lamps."

Departure from Stomio

The people of the local villages held "the monk," as they referred to Father Paisios, in great veneration. They loved and helped him sincerely, even if they didn't fully understand the treasure he had hidden within him. They saw something exceptional in him, and they were captivated by his love and goodness. For them, he was a guardian angel, consolation, and support amidst difficulties. Adults today who were small children at that time remember a emaciated monk traveling the streets of Konitsa with a quick step, deep in thought and looking neither left nor right.

The fame of his virtue extended well beyond Konitsa, and people from other regions came to see him as well. A group of young men who were studying theology became attached

to him. They corresponded with him, visited him, and would stay overnight at the monastery. This helped them spiritually, and nearly all of them ended up becoming monks.

Nevertheless, there were some visitors who never ceased to trouble the Elder with worldly ways of thinking, which they had no intention of abandoning. There were official efforts to build a gondola and a road up to the monastery. Some of these people were upset that the Elder had done away with worldly festivities on the grounds during the monastery's feast-day. Some sought to have him removed from the monastery so they could misappropriate its fields and forest. And there were still other reasons for hostility.

At one point at the beginning of his time in Stomio, the Elder left the monastery for a month. Returning on the eve of the monastery's feast day, he went into the Church to chant the service. When he finished, he noticed that, outside, people had lit fires in the courtyard and started dancing. Upset, that night he took his cassock and left to go back to the Holy Mountain. "They weren't spiritually mature yet," as he put it. But, since so many people urged him to return, he soon did so.

Later, in 1961, he again returned to the Holy Mountain. The people of Konitsa, determined to convince him to come back, sent a letter with many signatures on it to the monastery of Philotheou, asking the Elder to take pity on them and return. In one of his letters from that time, Father Paisios described the situation: "After I left Konitsa, the residents rose up. A little while after I arrived back [here] at the monastery of Philotheou, a letter arrived from the mayor, signed by a lot of other people including the governor. It asked them to allow me to return again to the monastery of

Stomio, because there was great need there and so on. They listed a number of reasons, but not everyone here would agree to give me the blessing. The way I understand it, they're ready to go all the way to Patriarch Athenagoras (1948-1972) and to Averof, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, to get him to plead with the State Administrator of the Holy Mountain (who answers to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs)."

And, after a series of persistent pleas, Father Paisios again returned to Stomio, receiving a letter of release from the Holy monastery of Philotheou dated August 7, 1961.

Seeing that the problems in Stomio remained, Father Paisios's brother Luke, along with another villager,[102] took it upon himself to build a little house on the outskirts of Konitsa with a cell, small chapel, and workroom, hoping that the Elder would agree to stay there. They didn't want the Elder to leave, because they didn't want to be deprived of his invaluable presence.

Even though he was rebuilding the monastery, driving away heretics—this, perhaps, was his greatest contribution—and helping many people, Father Paisios thought he wasn't doing anything at all, and he would often say to himself, "I'm a monk—what am I doing here in the world?" And he would complain to the Mother of God, "Oh, my Lady—I asked you for the desert and you brought me out into the world."

It seems that the Elder received an answer to his prayers. Years later, Abbot Kosmas of Stomio asked him how he had ended up leaving. "Well," he replied, "I asked the Panagia to show me where she wanted me to go, and she told me to go

102. Demetrios Kortsinoglou.

to Sinai." Father Paisios had been visited by a theologian from there,[103] and afterward he wrote the Archbishop of Sinai, Porphyrios III, asking if he could have permission to live in the area, free of obligations to the monastery. Permission was granted.

And so, seeing that his mission to the desert of the world had ended, and having fulfilled his vow to the Mother of God, Father Paisios departed once and for all from Stomio on September 30, 1962, to make his way to the God-trodden mountain of Sinai. He didn't tell the people why he was going away, since they would have objected and prevented him from leaving. He simply said that he had to travel somewhere for therapy. Many people wept at his departure, because he was their source of consolation and support.

The Elder not only succeeded in rebuilding the monastery of Stomio and writing its history: through his struggles and through the supranatural events he experienced, he also inscribed his own history on the rocks of Stomio. To this day, the people of Konitsa reverently preserve the memory of "the monk"—the monk known today the world over as Elder Paisios.

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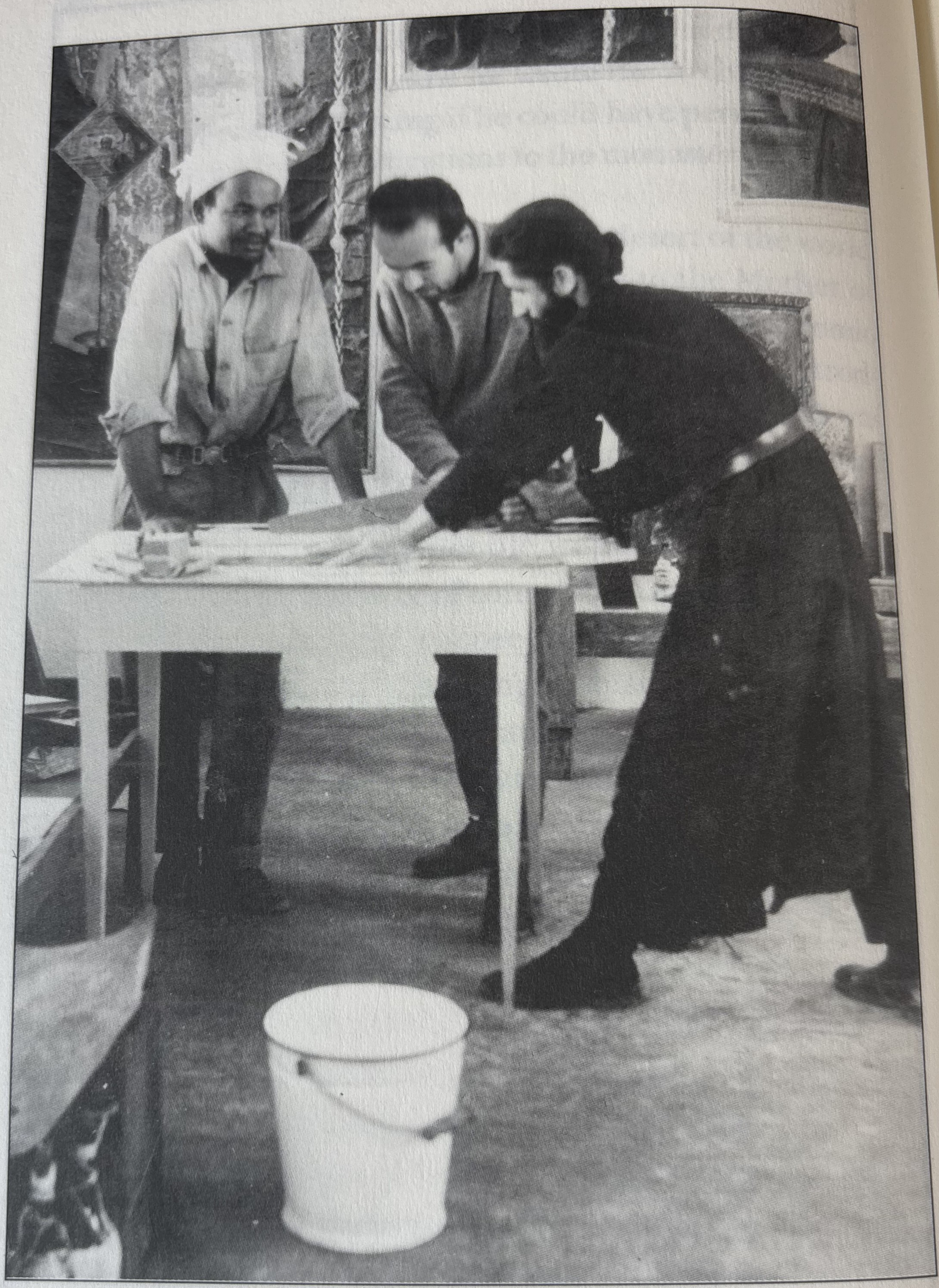
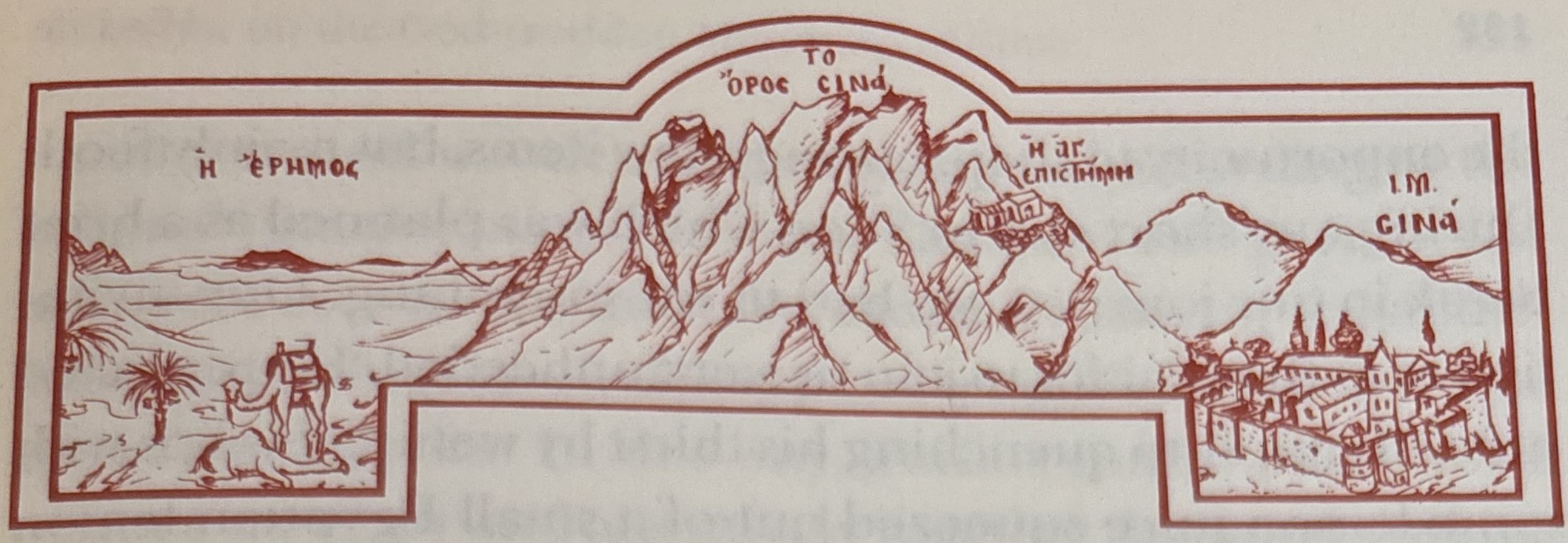
103. His visitor would later become Archbishop Damianos of Sinai (1973–).

A Hermit on the God-trodden Mountain of Sinai



The Elder working as a carpenter in the icon preservation workshop in the monastery at Sinai.



Journey to Sinai

"In autumn of 1962," relates an iconographer and conservator from Athens named Stavros[104], "I set out for the monastery of Sinai, having been invited to work on the conservation of the icons there.

"At the monastery's property in Cairo, around lunchtime one afternoon, I met the monk Paisios, who was also on his way to Sinai. He was extremely thin, an exceptionally light eater, and usually silent. A persistent cough testified of health problems.

"We remained in Cairo for about a week as we waited for our transportation to the monastery to be arranged. During this time I observed that Father Paisios systematically avoided the food that we were served, and that when he did eat it was because he felt he had to out of obedience. From this, and from what I would observe at the monastery later on, I understood that, among other monastic virtues, he possessed true and conscientious obedience.

"When they had finished arranging for our departure, we loaded our luggage into the taxi and set off. I remember how Paisios remained silent, in his corner of the car, all the way until we reached Suez. Another passenger and I took

104. Stavros Baltoyiannis.

the opportunity to shop, buying a few items, but mainly food. During our short stay in Suez, which was planned as a brief break in our journey, we had to eat something. Our invitation to Father Paisios to join us went unheeded. He restricted himself simply to quenching his thirst by wetting his lips with some lemon juice squeezed out of a small Egyptian lemon he had brought with him, which constituted his only supply of food.

"We stayed the evening in Pharan and set off for Sinai on the next morning. We arrived late in the afternoon. Paisios was soon led to his cell, and I was left with my co-worker,[105] who was awaiting my help with the icon-preservation project. We soon learned that, upon entering his cell, Paisios removed the mattress from his bed and unplugged the electric lamp which lit his room. His simplicity, ascetic spirit, innocence, and total dedication to God rapidly became apparent. He took care to do his share of the monastery work and was quickly recognized as a valuable and important member of the community.

"His other abilities and knowledge, such as his expertise in woodworking, soon became known. This skill of his gave us the idea of asking the monastery's permission to have the new monk help us with the various woodworking needs that often arose in our work.

"He succeeded, with hard work, in constructing a second wooden medium on which to place the icon of Christ we were working to preserve, which over time had been rent into two pieces of wood.[106] Artfully and inventively, he fash-

105. Tassos Margaritof.

106. This refers to the priceless Comnenian icon of Christ the Ruler of All,

ioned a second wooden underlay, carved according to the original dimensions of the icon. Thus, the two parts of the icon were set into the underlay that left room for the anticipated gap, which as often happens, would be filled in by the eye of the pilgrim. In this way, Paisios continued to work with us, carefully and attentively meeting the woodworking needs of the preservation workshop. The whole time, he worked silently and efficiently, radiating goodness and holiness. His abstention from the daily noonday meal, striking slimness, and relentless cough made us all worry about his health and try frequently to dissuade him from his extremely severe ascetic discipline. I will never forget his brilliant countenance when he was forced to reply to one such counsel of mine. 'Stavros,' he said, 'leave all that to us monks.'

"During the nearly forty days that we were at the monastery, Paisios was always the same: innocent, extremely spiritual, and thoughtful. And while he silently labored at his assigned tasks he was most likely at prayer. On my final day there, after saying my goodbyes, I departed with the certitude that I was leaving behind me a holy man.

"As time passed I would hear about Paisios, that he was getting progressively stricter with himself. Not too long after my departure, I learned that he had left the monastery for a desert place on the God-trodden Mountain, and that he lived there giving himself entirely to asceticism, coming down to the monastery only on occasion."

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which appears as no. 68 in the catalogue of icons of the Monastery of Sinai authored by G. and M. Sotiriou. [In the book in question, which unfortunately is extremely rare, the picture provided is of the icon before it was repaired as described here, the pieces being arranged as they would have been had the original survived. – eds.]

He Ends the Drought

When the Elder first went to Sinai, the area was afflicted with a terrible drought. Even under normal circumstances, the area rarely received rainfall, but the year he arrived the lack of rain was especially severe; it had not rained for three-and-a-half years. One day, a caravan was to go and collect rainwater from afar, but the Elder told them, "Wait, and leave tonight." That night he prayed, and it rained plentifully. The Elder once related: "I did pray then, but it was God Who took pity on the suffering inhabitants. It rained and the basins were filled with enough water for nearly two years."

Blessed Life in the Desert

Having asked for a blessing to live alone in the desert, Father Paisios settled in the ascetic hermitage of Saints Galaction and Episteme. It consisted of a chapel with a small cell attached to it, situated on a beautiful, elevated spot, exactly opposite the holy peak of Mount Sinai and less than an hour from the monastery. The cave of Saint Galaction was about two hundred yards up, and shortly beyond that was the skete that had been home to Saint Episteme and her fellow women ascetics. In spite of the aridity, the desert rocks were an inspiration: it was a truly holy and blessed place. So, there, high as an eagle, the Elder made his nest, or rather, as an eagle of the spirit, he established his perch.

There was a small well a stone's throw from his hermitage. In the course of twenty-four hours, two to three quarts of water could be drawn. "I went with a little tin can to

get some water," recalled the Elder, "to make some tea or wet my face a little, gratefully praying the Akathist Hymn along the way, and my eyes flooded with tears. 'My God,' I would say, 'just a little water to drink—I don't want anything else.'"

Even the smallest amounts of water are priceless to a person living in the desert, and yet the Elder shared what little he had with the thirsty birds and other wild animals.

Once, someone asked the Elder what it was like living in the desert. "My food," he replied, "was tea and dry bread that I prepared myself. I made *petoura* [thinly sliced dough, like square noodles] and let it dry out in the sun. It became so hard, it would break like glass. Sometimes I would boil rice packed into a tin can. The can was my coffee-pot, pan, plate, and cup, all in one. That and a spoon a little smaller than a soup spoon was all I had in my kitchen.

"I also had an undershirt, which I wore at night in order to protect me somewhat from the cold. I would drink a cup of black tea, to help me through the night vigil, and I added a spoonful of sugar to it, which was like putting on another undershirt.[107] I had a set of heavy clothes, because at night it became quite cold. I didn't have a light or even a flashlight, just a lighter so I could see a little when I took one of the stone paths with stairs. I also needed it for when I wanted to light a little fire with some twigs to make a hot drink. I had a bottle of fuel to refill the lighter and some flint, but nothing else.

"Once I planted a tomato plant, but afterward I was re-

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107. That is, the calories from the extra spoonful of sugar warmed him as an undershirt would have.

proached by my conscience, so I uprooted it to avoid provoking the Bedouin. It didn't seem right for the poor Bedouins to be without tomatoes and for me, a monk, to have them, even if it was just one plant.

"During the day I said the Jesus prayer and made handicrafts. Prayer and work with my hands: that was my typicon. At night I did a few hours worth of prostrations without paying attention to the number. I didn't read the services; I did them on the prayer-rope.[108] I used to rest toward the morning.

"To keep curious people away, I painted a skull and crossbones on the rocks with some green, oil-based paint. One time a German tourist wanted to come up to the cell. He thought it was a minefield [because of the sign], but it looked like he knew about them, so he went up to the top, watching where he stepped. I was watching him from above. Then I went into the cave of Saint Galaction and pulled a thorny bush across the entrance behind me. He looked hard, but he couldn't find me, and he went back down the hill."

Father Paisios greatly simplified his life, giving himself over to asceticism wholeheartedly and without distraction. Later, he would describe his experience at Sinai in a few nostalgic words: "The desert desolates the passions. When you respect it and adjust yourself to it, it lets you feel its consolation."

The Elder loved to visit places where ascetics had lived,

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108. That is to say, he prayed with his prayer-rope for the same amount of time it would have taken to read each service. A fixed number of prayers corresponded to each service; for example, for Compline, twelve hundred repetitions of "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me" and three hundred of "Most holy Theotokos, save us."—eds.

and he marveled at their tiny caves. In one he found a small cistern; in another he could see black spots on the wall where cooking fires had once been lit. The old ascetic dwellings inspired and moved him. He also visited the ascetic home of Saint George of Arselaitou, in a totally deserted area once occupied by hermits. He spent Great Lent at the hermitage of Saint Stephen, located underneath the holy peak of the mountain, which is referred to in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*.[109] The Elder fasted strictly, nearly starving himself. He had with him only a small tin can to boil water, which he drew from a well that was further down at the hermitage of the Prophet Elias.

He adopted the extremely painful practice of walking barefoot on the desert rocks and sand that during the day became so hot that the Bedouin would soft-boil eggs by putting them in the sand and that during the night became so cold that walking on the ground was like walking on ice. As a result of this practice, his heels were covered in cuts that bled. Nevertheless, he kept his shoes in his feed bag and wore them when he went down to the monastery, or met someone on the road.

He went down to the monastery every Sunday or two, helping with the service and communing. There, he had a small cell, quite isolated, in the tower where they had once confined people who had been exiled to Sinai. He took part in collective work activities, in the woodworking projects and in pruning the olive trees. He was never a burden on the monastery. He never accepted the food that was distributed to all the fathers and even refused the small amounts of

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109. 7:50

money given as blessings, which all the Sinaite fathers were justified in receiving.[110]

Some of the fathers came to him for counsel, benefiting from his experience and discernment. He also had a disciple, a novice named Euthymios, who received spiritual guidance from him while living in the monastery.[111] Archbishop Porphyrios of Sinai, a good and humble hierarch, also had great esteem for the Elder, and, when it came to the task of repopulating the monastery, he agreed to whatever the Elder advised. He said of the Elder, "In all of the years I've been here on Sinai, I have never met another monk as virtuous, ascetic, and adept at handiwork as Father Paisios. There was one exception, a retired border guard who was humble, quiet, and virtuous, but he lacked the grace that Father Paisios had."

Tasting Divine Communion

At the outset, when the Elder had first arrived at Sinai, he decided to go out to his cell and to stay there for two weeks without coming down to the monastery. He informed the other fathers so they wouldn't worry. One of them, Father Sophrony, replied, "Will you be able to stand it up there, Elder?"

"I'll try," responded the Elder. "I'll beg God to help me endure." Later, the Elder would describe the experience: "What I went through up there for fifteen days, struggling with the tempter—it defies description, you can't even

110. The fathers at the monastery received money from a common fund for their material needs.—eds.

111. Euthymios Skliris, later known as Father Athanasios of Stavronikita.

imagine! He was constantly telling me to go down to the monastery, to see people and visit with them to be consoled. I'll just tell you one thing. For fifteen days, I felt like I was nailed to the Cross. Later, on the second Sunday, I came down to the monastery to attend Liturgy. When I communed, the Holy Mysteries tasted like meat that was very sweet, and I felt strength within me. It was the Body and Blood of Christ."

Strengthened by this sign, looking out at his ascetic cell from the monastery, he said to the devil, "Come back now if you want to, and we'll do battle. I'm not afraid of you any more."

Handiwork and Almsgiving

The Elder's handiwork was wood-carving. "I carved icons," he later recalled, "of the Prophet Moses receiving the Ten Commandments. I cut the wood on my own. By the stream in the direction of the chapel of the Holy Unmercinaries there was a kind of grove, a few trees that looked like poplar trees. I cut them down and let them dry out. Then, I carved out pieces of wood and made my little icons. Many times, at night, I would open the door of my cell, and in the moonlight I would say the prayer while I sanded and prepared the wood. For tools I had just two little blades from a pair of Singer scissors that I had brought with me from Greece. I took them apart, sharpened the blades, and painted them with green oil-paint so they wouldn't reflect the sun and blind me as I worked. At first, it took me three days to finish one little icon. Later on, I could do it in eleven hours.

"I gave my handiwork to the monastery, and they sold it.

The pilgrims quickly bought it all. I then took the money and gave it to some taxi drivers that I knew from Cairo. I told them to buy clothes, hats, biscuits, food, and so on. Then I filled my bag with these 'blessings' and asked where the Bedouin camped. I went to their tents, stood outside and yelled for the kids to come, and I handed out the blessings."

"One time when I went to the Bedouin camp, a grateful little boy named Suleiman took a rooster and got ready to slaughter it and serve it to me for dinner. He wanted to thank me for the blessings that I gave them. 'Leave it for another time, Suleiman,' I told him. What else could I say that he would be able to understand?"

With the money the Elder gained from his wood-carving, he even managed to help an orphan boy to study theology in Greece.

The Elder neglected himself out of his great love for God's creatures, tiring himself out to help others. He didn't go and venerate the holy places in Jerusalem—something he wanted to do very much—so that the Bedouin children wouldn't be deprived of the blessings that he brought them. They felt and understood the great love he had for them, and that he had no ulterior motive or self-serving aim, and they loved him immensely. Every visit of their beloved "Abuna Paisi," as they called him, was a festival of true joy.

When Bedouin children would visit him at his ascetic's hut, arriving with feet covered with cuts and scrapes from walking barefoot, he would put wax in their wounds and give them each a pair of sandals. To others he would distribute hats in order to protect them from the sun so they wouldn't get dizzy. Generally speaking he would give them whatever he possessed.

But so many children began coming that the money he earned from his wood-carving was insufficient. He was faced with a dilemma: "Have I come here to help the Bedouin or to pray for the world?" So he decided to limit his handiwork in hopes that God would take care of the rest.

That very day a Greek doctor who lived abroad visited him. The Elder spoke with him as if he had known him for years. "Come in," he said. "I've been waiting for you." He spent hours with the doctor in an atmosphere of love, discussing different matters, giving him advice, and even revealing to him his knowledge of some of the man's personal affairs. The Elder's spiritual gifts made such a great impression on the doctor that he gave him one hundred pounds. "Take this to help the Bedouin," he said to the Elder, "so you won't have to set your prayer aside and interrupt your spiritual discipline."

"It was too much for me," the Elder later recalled. "I left him alone and went to my cell, because I couldn't hold back the tears, seeing God's immediate answer. I was overwhelmed by the power of His love and providence." At the end of their talk, because the sun had already set, the Elder led him back by a shorter path.

Tempted in the Desert

One day while the Elder sitting on a rock by a deep ravine, doing his handiwork and saying the Jesus prayer, the devil appeared to him and said, "Jump, Paisios—I promise, you won't get hurt at all." The Elder continued his prayer and handiwork unfazed, paying no attention to the devil. The tempter continued to prod him to jump into the chasm,

repeating the same promise, for about an hour and a half.

Finally, the Elder replied, "All right—let's lay this idea of yours to rest." And, taking a stone, he threw it over the edge.

The devil, having failed to throw him off the cliff, replied with feigned amazement, "Even Christ didn't give an answer like that! Yours was better!"

"Christ is God," replied the Elder, "not a clown like me. 'Get thee behind me, Satan.'"

Thus, by the divine grace within him, the Elder avoided the first temptation of jumping into the chasm, where he would have been dashed to pieces on the rocks. And he also avoided the deeper pit of pride—of accepting the praise of the devil and thinking of himself as greater than Christ.

In his cell, the Elder had an old alarm clock that he had to shake to make work. Once, as he was rocking it back and forth to get it started, the evil one suggested a thought: "If you were married, that is how you would be rocking your little baby." The Elder hadn't thought of such a thing even while he was still a layman. He reacted swiftly—without the least delay, he hurled the clock against a rock three yards away.

It should have been shattered to pieces, but, when it came within a few inches of the rock, it abruptly stopped and slowly descended till it stood upright. Totally unharmed, it started to work normally. The Elder could hear it ticking. "Ah—the devil!" he said, knowing that demonic energy was at work. In the end, he destroyed the clock with a stone.

The most notable aspect of the incident is Father Paisios's immediate reaction. The Elder didn't delay his response to the attacking thought for an instant. Neither conversing with

it nor trying to answer it, the hermit reacted instead with lightening speed.

The Elder related the following incident as well: "One night I was going down a path with steps. As I was trying to start my worn-out lighter to see where I was walking, a hand suddenly appeared in front of me, carrying a light that lit up the path and the area around it. I immediately closed my eyes, turned my head, and said to the devil, 'I can do without your light.'"

A Hermit's Companions

"When I was on Sinai," the Elder told us, "I had two partridges. At the time I was going through a difficult stretch, and the birds would come and keep me company as consolation. Wherever I went, as soon as they heard me, they would come. When I would carve icons, they would climb up on my shoulders. Once, I was sick for a whole week. When I got better, I went up to the top of the hill like I was used to doing, and I called out to the birds, to feed them. They were nowhere to be found. I set the food down and left. I went up again the next day, and this time the birds went ahead of me on the road, flapping their wings all around me. They hadn't eaten their food; but as soon as they saw me, they ate it.

"Wild animals are very magnanimous. I found more magnanimity in wild animals than in a lot of people. We're better off being friends with them than with worldly people. If you want a true friend, after God, be friends with the Saints; otherwise, make friends with the wild animals."

He also told us the following: "One day I made a mush [like cornmeal] with rice, and the next day I cleaned out the tin can I had boiled the rice in, and I threw the dried food that was left to the mice. From that day on, every time I would carve icons and wood pieces would go flying, they thought—hearing the noise and seeing the wood—that it was rice, and they would gather around. Even wild animals become calm around us—when we live life right."

The Passionless Ancestors of God

Once, on Sinai, the Elder beheld a supranatural event in the Holy Spirit: the holy and temperate marital relations of the Ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna, by which the Holy Theotokos was conceived and born. The Elder related to us the revelation he received: "Saints Joachim and Anna were completely spiritual people, without any carnal-mindedness at all. They were the most passionless couple that's ever lived. First, they prayed to God separately, with tears, that He would give them a child, and then they came together, out of obedience to God and not out of any carnal desire. And, since the conception happened without self-indulgent pleasure, the Panagia was all-pure and chaste. Of course, she wasn't free from ancestral sin, like the papists falsely believe, because she was conceived in the usual or natural way [that is, not without seed, like Christ]; but still [it was] totally without passion, as God wanted people to be born."

Once the Elder was stressing these truths during a discussion. Seeing that the other person was hesitant and re-

luctant to accept his words, he stood up and in a decisive tone declared, "I experienced what took place!" He wanted to make clear that he was expressing, not the content of his own reverent thoughts, but a divine revelation.

At the Forty Martyrs' Chapel

Once, during the Paschal season, the Elder had gone with other fathers to celebrate Liturgy at a chapel named after the Holy Forty Martyrs. They took with them quite a few red-colored Pascha eggs. After Divine Liturgy, The Bedouin arrived and they passed out the eggs to them. There were forty eggs, and exactly forty Bedouin had shown up there, at the chapel of the Holy Forty Martyrs.

His Mother's Repose

One day, the Elder felt an unexplainable consolation, and a great love for the Mother of God. He wondered what it was and why it was happening. Having noted the day on which it had happened,[112] he later learned that this had been the day of the repose of his mother, for whom he had tremendous love, but whom he had abandoned out of love for Christ and the Theotokos. It was as if the Theotokos were saying to him, "Don't worry, don't fret – I'm your mother." From the moment that he became a monk, she had, so to speak, adopted him. And, in fact, he was made worthy to see her on many occasions, to speak with her, and to receive food from her immaculate hands.

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112. October 6, 1963.

"Kazantzakis"

Once, the Elder went up to the peak of Saint Catherine's with some of the other fathers to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. When they had finished, the others began to descend, but the Elder stayed behind. There was a rock there on which the Cretan writer Nikos Kazantzakis, a professed atheist and the author of *The Last Temptation of Christ*, had inscribed his name; and the Elder began scratching it out with his carving knife. Father Paisios, who was repulsed by Kazantzakis because of his atheism and blasphemy, didn't even want to see his name written or hear him spoken of. He thought it was unfitting for pilgrims to see the name of a blasphemer on that holy spot—for there to be "the desolation" of atheism "in a holy place."[113]

One of the fathers, also a Cretan, heard Father Paisios scraping the rock with the carving knife. Thinking that he was fixing the stone path, he called out, "Come on, Father Paisios—let the path be. It's time to go." Smiling, the Elder replied, "Whatever I can do to help, father ..."

Consolation for a Non-communicant

One Sunday morning, the Elder saw pilgrims ascending to the Holy Peak, and he realized that the monastery would be celebrating Divine Liturgy. (Normally, Divine Liturgy

113. See Matt 24:15. [Regarding Kazantzakis, see also the elder's recollection of a case of demon-possession in pp. 555-556, "Healings of demoniacs"; The possessed man had "been told to say the prayer 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.' When he said it, the demons would whisper to him, 'Don't say that name. You should say "Kazantzakis," all the time ...'"—eds.]

was not celebrated at the monastery unless pilgrims were present.) So he followed them, and at the monastery he asked for a blessing to commune, confessing to the priest that the day before he had broken the fast by putting a spoonful of oil in his food. He had done it because it was a Saturday, and he hadn't known there would be a Liturgy on the next day.[114] And he had gone without oil on every other day of the week, eating only dry foods. Nevertheless, the priest didn't give him the blessing. The Elder, humbly accepting this, did not commune. Yet he experienced the same great consolation and joy that day that he would experience when he did commune.

Unseen Warfare and Indescribable States of Being

In a letter dated March 3, 1964, the Elder related the following: "The demon often troubles me, even though I've crushed my flesh. I thank the Panagia that she's not repulsed by me—instead she's always there to help. The all-bountiful God allows temptations to come so we'll struggle and receive the incorruptible crown of victory. A few days ago, a demon had been bothering me a lot while I was in my cell. It lasted for a whole week, while I was getting ready to receive communion on the Holy Peak, where Liturgy was going to be served. I thank the good Lord, Who protected me, because

114. The normal fast for Wednesday and Friday is a strict one, excluding both oil and wine, but the Church calendar never designates Saturdays and Sundays as strict fast days, because on these days Christ's victory in the Resurrection is specially remembered. At the same time, it is a practice in Greece, mainly in the monasteries, to fast strictly the day or evening before one communes, on weekends and weekdays alike.—eds.

the fighting was heavy... Afterward, the good Lord made me worthy to commune on the Holy Peak, having sheltered me and kept me safe. That whole day I felt so much joy—joy beyond description. I was overwhelmed by the great love of God, and I felt His Presence around me. The enemy, the devil, had fought me like that to stop me from experiencing this spiritual exaltation—which would be a source of spiritual strength for a long time..."

The Sinaite ascetic was now living a life like that of the bodiless angels. He was, as was said of Saint Sava the Sanctified, "alone by himself in solitude, conversing with God," in "ceaseless prayers and nearness to God."[115] Taken captive by divine eros, his prayer was as unceasing as his breath, being uninterrupted even in sleep. He was nursed by grace. He intensely lived God's presence and all the great events that had taken place in the days of the Prophet Moses. He once described his cave: "The entire mountain and the rock had turned soft as dough 'because God descended upon it in fire.'[116] That's why the impression of Moses's back was left imprinted in the cave."[117]

At Esphigmenou, as we have already noted, when he was spiritually exhausted, the Elder had a profound mystical ex-

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115. *The Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, p. 108.

116. Exod. 19:18.

117. According to Sinaite tradition, when the glory of the Lord passed by Moses, it caused the rock to soften, thus receiving the imprint of his body. Christian tradition records more than one instance of stone softening in this manner: accounts of pilgrims to the Holy Land from the first millennium mention several such cases, including the stone on which the Lord stood when He appeared before Pilate in the Praetorium (Jerusalem Pilgrims, p. 141), the rock on which He knelt in prayer on Gethsemane (pp. 177–178), and the place of His Ascension on the Mount of Olives (p. 222).—eds.

perience; and in the course of describing it he made a statement about his time on Sinai.[118] "On Sinai," he said, "I experienced greater states [of being] in a different way." What exactly he experienced of the vision of God on Sinai, he declined to describe further. Evidently, it was something similar to his experience at Esphigmenou – during which he "saw and consciously lived grace," and which sustained him spiritually for ten years – but of even greater intensity. It is likely that he was not speaking of a vision or miracle, but of frequent experiences during which he received increased grace, which made his entire inner condition more spiritual. "I feel," he wrote, "something arising within me like the sweetness of the dawn."

All that the Elder experienced, known to us and unknown, was the secret instrument of divine grace, preparing him for his work and mission.

Leaving the Sweet Desert

Such a life did the Elder live, filled with joy at finding what he had sought for so many years. But his health was declining, and he was suffering from headaches because of the lack of oxygen at this high elevation. Since God fed him with heavenly manna and consoled him with His grace, the Elder at first ignored his symptoms. But in time his condition forced him to attend to them. He refers to this in a letter dated March 3, 1964: "I see that God is making me descend little by little. I'm in the monastery now, where I've been for a week because I have a problem with asthma. My cell was over

118. See pp. 71-72, "A visit of divine grace" – eds.

a mile above sea level, so I was suffering a lot. I pushed myself relentlessly, but it was impossible for me to stay there, because I couldn't breathe. Here in the monastery we're about a quarter-mile lower. If I'm doing badly here too, I'll come to Greece ... Anyhow, I'm leaving everything in God's hands. Let the One Who is good by nature do what's best for my soul. Right now nothing is certain."

When he saw that his health was getting worse, he decided to leave the sweet desert of Sinai. He was sad, because he wanted to stay there for the rest of his life, "to serve God on this mountain."[119] He loved this desert, for there it was that he had lived the true solitary life of the hermit. Later, toward the end of his life, he missed Sinai, and he showed an interest in the re-establishment and spiritual radiance of the monastery.

On his way back to the Holy Mountain, the Elder met at a church in Athens a professor of the Theological School of that city.[120] The professor was impressed by the ascetic, who, even though he was ill, stood standing throughout the service. Approaching him, he said, "Won't you sit down a little even now?"

In the words of the Psalter, the Elder could say, "I have seen iniquity and gainsaying in the city" of Athens.[121] The devil attempted to trouble the Elder, not through the sense of sight, as he had on Sinai, but through one of his servants. While trying to find his way to the address of an acquaintance, Elder Paisios asked someone for directions. The per-

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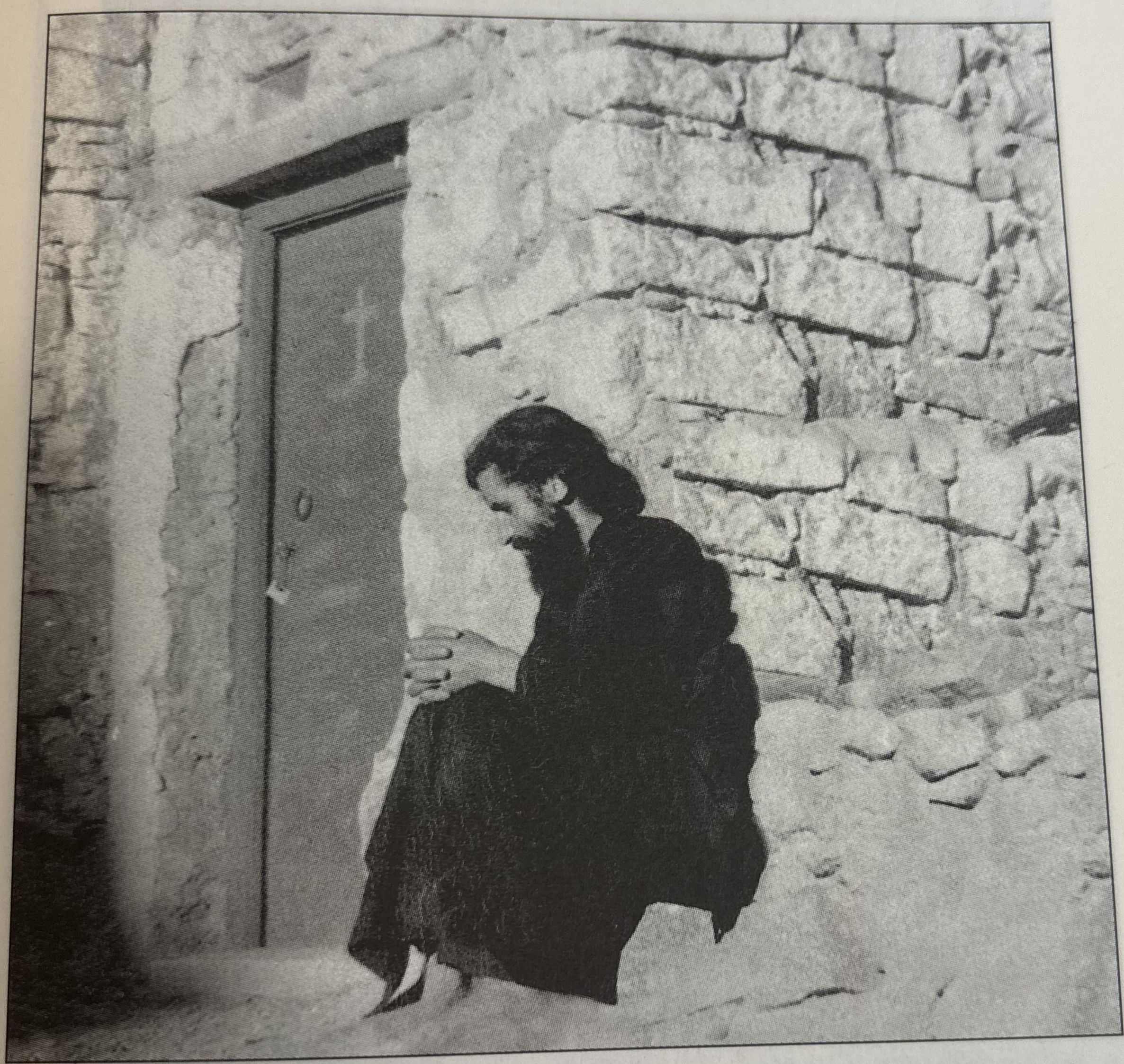
119. Exod. 3:12.

120. Dr. Panagiotis Bratsiotis.

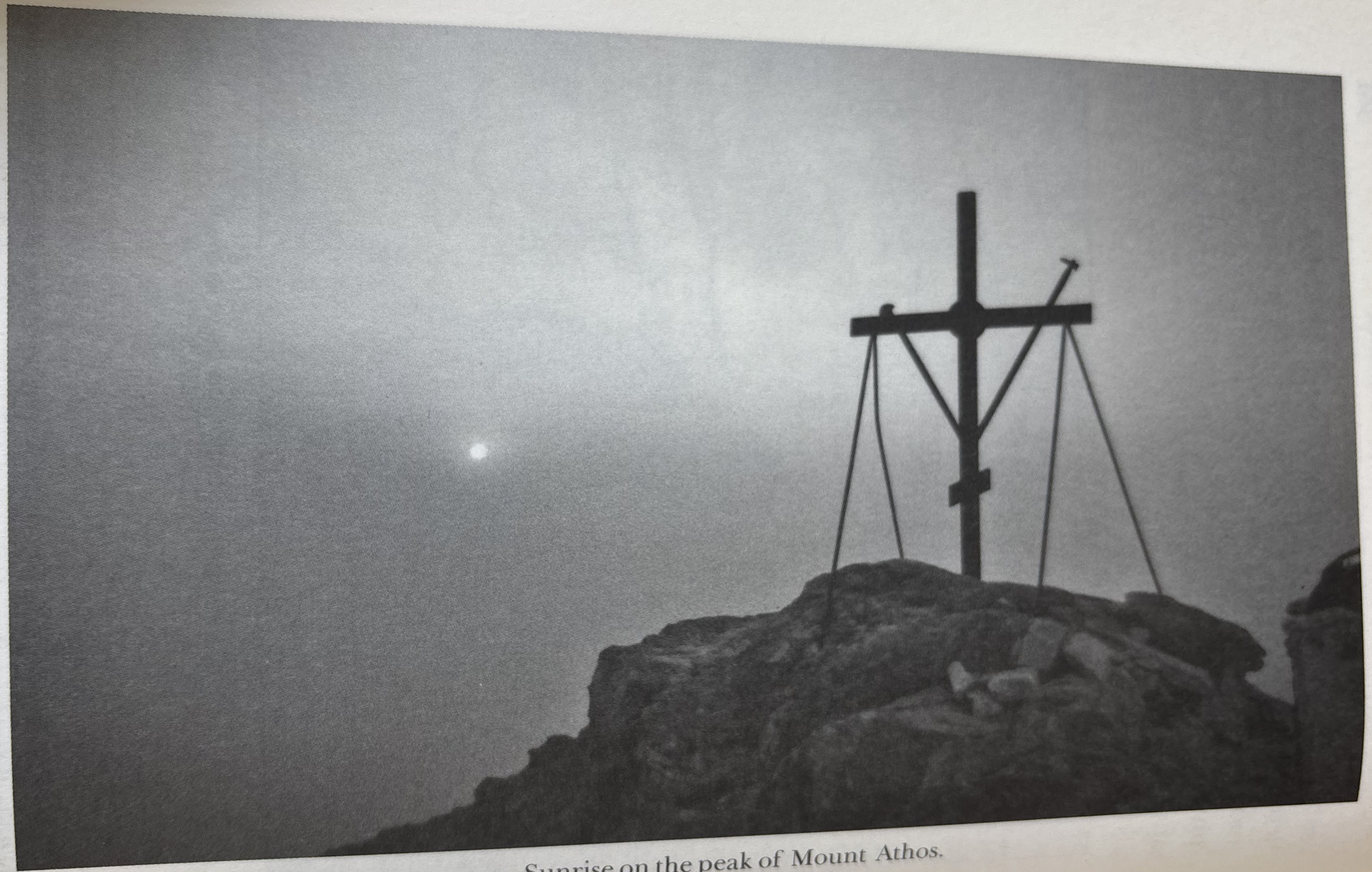
121. Ps. 54:10 (55:10).

son he asked brought him to a house, opened the door, and led him in. It was a house of sin! The Elder, surprised, was momentarily at a loss. Then he called upon God for help, pushed the door open and fled "as a gazelle from the snares, and as a bird from a trap."[122]



The Elder outside of his hermitage in Sinai.

122. Prov. 6:5. [OSB: 6:6. Where the verse-numbering of the 2008 Orthodox Study Bible differs from that of other translations, it is given in brackets. – eds.]



Sunrise on the peak of Mount Athos.

At Iveron Skete

Iveron Skete. The hermitage of the Archangels.

Stillness or a Brotherhood?

Upon returning to the Holy Mountain, the Elder headed for the sanctified desert of Kapsala*, a hesychastic and ascetic area near Karyes*. But, unable to find a peaceful and quiet location, out of obedience to an Elder he went to Iveron Skete, where he found the Hermitage of the Archangels. He arrived there on May 12, 1964.

On July 24, he would write: "By the grace of God I've gotten a hermitage in the deserted Iveron Skete. It has everything needed for a life of stillness. Out of fifteen cells, only seven are inhabited. Liturgy, in the main church, is celebrated only on Saturday and Sunday, and the other services are said in our cells. Mine has a chapel dedicated to the Holy Archangels. It also has a little outdoor space with a few olive trees, a small garden with water, and so on. Of course, the house is old and I'm fixing it up. I see things moving in the direction of a small brotherhood. The truth is, this worries me a lot, because I've lived alone, and I can see in myself that I'll be able to make more progress on my own. I've beseeched the Lord about it more than a little, but I see that it's His will. I went to my spiritual father, a Russian hermit, Father Tikhon, and he told me that I have to accept however many monks want to live with me. He told me that the most I can do is to build a small cell a short way off, to be alone and enjoy some silence.

"I've started to repair the hermitage, because it's possible that our friends will arrive soon, and I have to be ready to provide for them, as much as I can be. I'm short of everything. The house needs to be renovated, things need to be bought, and so on, until we can start doing some handiwork. I've worked without stopping for three months now. Thanks be to God, I've managed to finish a lot. I have to complete everything in a year, so I can start the main work: prayer and study, with a little handiwork on the side. This way, we'll be free of cares and concerns, and the brothers will be able to ascend on high. We get our olive oil from the olive tree, so our chapel is taken care of. We'll have enough vegetables from the garden as well as potatoes and beans for the winter, not to mention cabbage and the rest. There are different kinds of other trees too, and a lot of grapevines. When the brethren do some handiwork (as a way to pass their time, not so they can be consumed by it) they'll be able to come to know themselves and, after that, God. God who in His goodness sends help to the good and the evil, will, as a good Father, help us – I believe it. And that's even more true if it really is His will for something to happen that will be to His glory.

"Later on I'm thinking of making small cells for the brothers about a hundred yards apart, so we can be together and separate at the same time. Because I've lived all the different ways of [monastic] life, and I've seen that everything comes together in stillness."

Life at the Skete*

Among the few fathers at the skete, Father Pachomios, from the brotherhood of Papa-Neilos, stood out.[123] He could grab hold of snakes and scorpions with his bare hands. Elder Paisios had a great deal to say about his simplicity, his virtue, and his perfect obedience to his Elder. All this made Father Pachomios dear to the Elder, who would often send him blessings and gifts.

Two of the monks who came to live near the Elder were the hieromonks Basil and Gregory, who would later go on to re-establish coenobitic life at the Holy monastery of Stavronikita*, where Father Basil would become abbot. The Elder made his hermitage available to the fathers for a time until they were able to settle in their own, and he moved into another, very small one that he built out of chestnut wood a short distance away.

Every night he kept vigil, making countless prostrations and saying many prayers with his prayer-rope. His chief labor was prayer that he struggled to make unceasing by preventing any interruption in his noetic communication with God.

In spite of his unstable health, the Elder forced himself, fasting to the point of exhaustion. And just when his "batteries" had "run out" and he had come to the end of the road, he would inexplicably regain his strength and continue the struggle.

Whenever he went down to the monastery dock he would walk barefoot, like he had on Sinai. He would keep his shoes

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123. *Athonite Fathers*, p. 8.

in his pack and put them on when he saw someone coming.

He taught himself the art of wood carving and crafted very beautiful pectoral and blessing crosses. And so, by the work of his hands, he was able to meet his own needs and those of others.

He gladly gave of himself in helping the fathers of the skete, and he would run joyfully to help anyone who asked him. He accepted the position of Dikaios*. As soon as he finished his duties in the main church, so as not to lose his peace and stillness, he would return to his hermitage, leaving a note instructing pilgrims to ring the bell when they arrived. He would hear it from his cell, where he was resting, and he would come down and look after the pilgrims, giving them bodily and spiritual rest.

During this time, he met a miracle-working pilgrim. The man was a longshoreman from Piraeus, and by the power of his prayer he had raised his blasphemous father-in-law from the dead, so that he could repent.

The Elder also related the following story: "Once a priest came to the skete. When I first saw him I wasn't 'told' anything about him [by God]. As we talked, I realized that he was a Catholic. I told him sternly, 'Put your biretta on first, and then go visit monasteries.'[124]

"I found out later on that he was a Catholic priest named Bonaventure, and wherever he went he dressed to fit in, to fool people: with Greek Orthodox clergy he dressed like a Greek Orthodox priest, with Russian Orthodox clergy, like a

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124. A biretta is a type of head-covering worn by Latin clergy of various ranks. (When this event took place, prior to the Second Vatican Council, it was more common for Latin clergy to wear a biretta than it would later become.) – eds.

Russian Orthodox priest, and so on."

The Elder saw before him a man with long hair, beard, and a cassock; but he wasn't fooled by appearances. Divine Grace gave witness within him that this apparent priest didn't really have the priesthood. In the words of Scripture, he "needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man."[125]

Help for a Departed Soul

The Elder related: "As soon as I went to live at the skete, old Thanassis, who worked for Philotheou as a forester, found out about it and came to see me. He was a friend of mine, and he brought me some blessings, since it was early on then, and I didn't have anything.

"I thanked him, and I told him to write down the names of his departed relatives, so that I could commemorate them. Influenced by a Jehovah's Witness, he replied, 'When someone dies, there's nothing else – after death everything's lost.'

"Soon after that, he himself died. When I found out, I went to Philotheou and saw his grave. Every day I prayed from the heart that God would give rest to his soul.

"About thirty days afterward, I found out that someone from Philotheou was looking for me. He came to me all upset. It was one of the stewards of the monastery. 'Father,' he said to me, 'old Thanassis, the one who just died, came to me and complained that I've forgotten him and haven't done anything for him, and that you're the only one who helps him with your prayers. And the truth is, I haven't com-

125. John 2:25.

memorated him in my prayers. I'm in charge of things at the monastery now, and I have a lot of work. What can I do? I've had to put my prayer rule aside.'

'Well, now you'll have to do even more.'"

This event strengthened the Elder, so that he prayed even more for the souls of all the departed.

The Holy Forerunner Comes to his Defense

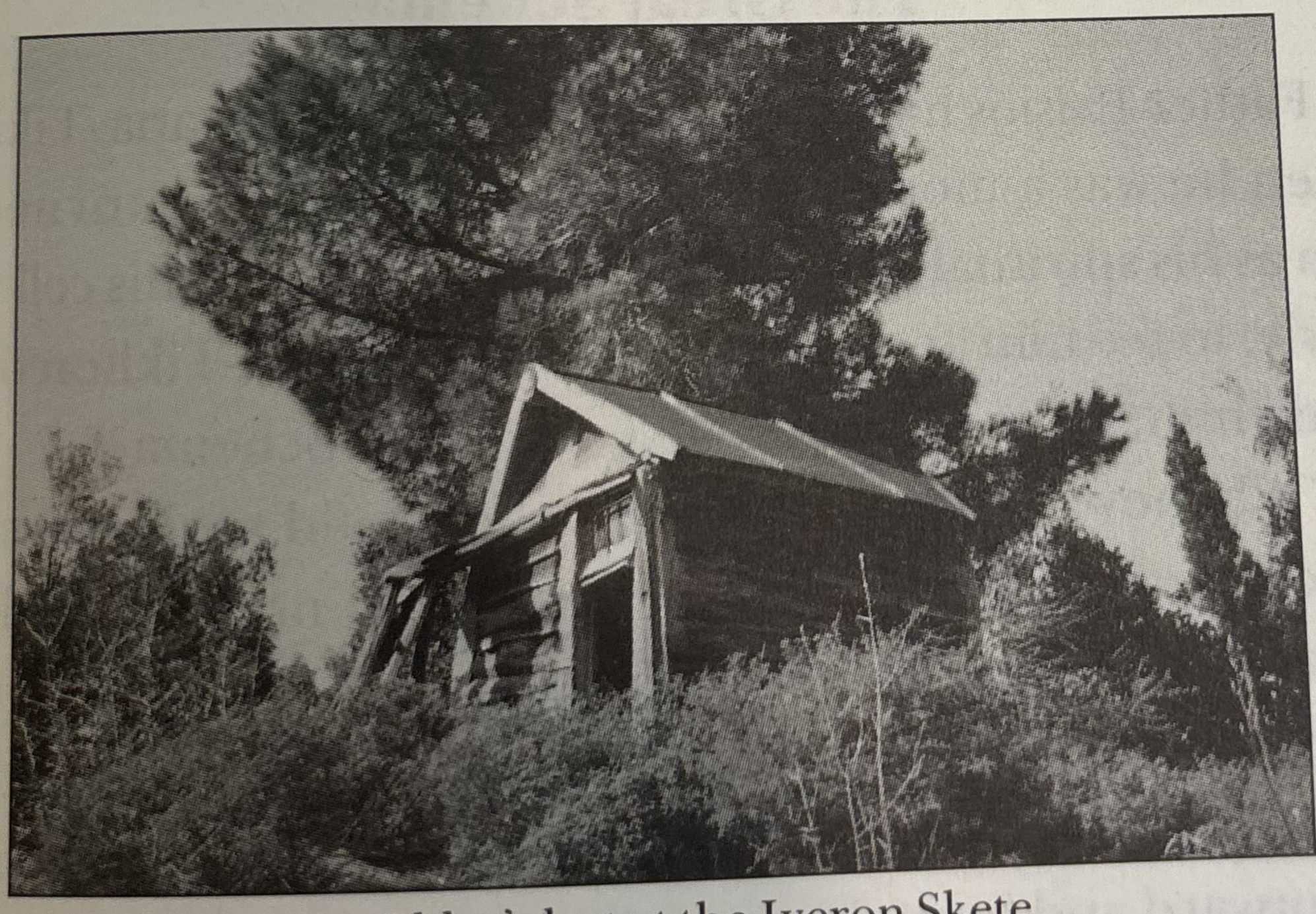
"I gazed out on the ravine," the Elder once recalled, "and I was filled with longing, a divine love. My heart leapt at the thought of staying there so I could have greater silence and prayer. I went to one of the heads of the monastery of Iveron to ask a blessing to build a hut there. He started yelling, 'What do you so-called ascetics think you're doing?' and so on. But that night the Holy Forerunner [the protector[126] of the Skete of Iveron] appeared to him and started to hit him [because of how he had reacted]. After awaking, he was frightened and went down to the church. He couldn't calm down, and he kept asking the fathers to interrupt the service and hold a meeting so he could tell them what had happened. They said, 'We can't interrupt the service—be patient and wait until it's finished.' Afterward, they got together and he told them what had happened to him. After this, the monk didn't just give me a blessing to build a hut—he even sent building supplies with some mules. There was so much humidity there that water dripped from the nails. That's why the fathers had abandoned the place before. I sat there and coughed up blood. That's why I ended up leav-

126. That is, the patron saint.—eds.

ing two ribs at the sanatorium. I had exhausted myself by hauling material to build the hut.[127] Still, I felt a kind of joy! It was spiritual, but not entirely spiritual, joy. Heavenly joy is somewhat different. It's an action of divine grace."

A Demonic Stoning

An impoverished man, who had a blessing from the authorities on Athos to travel around the mountain seeking alms,[128] came by the skete one day to beg. The Elder gave him all the money he had, which at the time was quite a lot. Not even the monasteries had given the man so much. The devil, who couldn't stand seeing the material as immaterial,



The Elder's hut at the Iveron Skete.

127. The hut can be seen to the present day, next to the old main church and a few yards from the miraculous spring of the skete's founder, Hieromartyr Jacob. — eds.

128. Specifically, he had "*pantahousa*", a written permission to seek financial support from the monasteries, sketes, and hermitages. — eds.

was full of anger at the Elder's total lack of possessiveness—and he threw a large rock at him, which lodged into the wall just above his head.

Fed by an Angel

The Elder related: "It was the Dormition Lent, and I hadn't eaten in days. In that condition, I was asked to take a sick monk down to the waterfront. I did it, and right afterward I felt extremely weak. As I approached my cell, someone appeared in front me and gave me a basket of fruit, with grapes and figs, and then instantly vanished."

The Great Schema

Father Paisios had come to know the Elder Papa-Tikhon when he was a monk at Esphigmenou. Now he turned to him as his spiritual father. He would go down to his cell regularly, to see him and ask for advice. And Papa-Tikhon often asked him, "When will you take the Great Schema?"

"Whenever it's blessed, Elder," he would reply. "I'm not concerned about it." Father Paisios had not received the Great Schema, even though he had been a monk for many years. What mattered to him most was to live as a monk. He wasn't interested in simply taking on the Great Schema in an outward and formal manner, but in acquiring the grace of the Schema. He placed more importance on wearing it within himself, on becoming a monk in his inner man. As he would later say, "I was never concerned about when I would become a monk of the Great Schema. Even being a monk or not didn't bother me. What mattered to me was to live as a

monk. If the soul hasn't been cultivated, hasn't acquired interior weapons—even though the Schema is a weapon in itself, it doesn't help. For a monk of the Schema, even the smallest disobedience is a heavy liability. Great strictness and precision are necessary. We must struggle to keep the promises we've made [in taking it].[129] It's good to struggle to do this even before you receive the Schema."

He had no desire to acquire the Great Schema, because in his humility he considered himself unworthy, and because he wanted to be entirely faithful to the promises it requires. Now, however, with the encouragement of his Elder, he consented. Father Paisios received the Great and Angelic Schema from the honorable hands of Elder Tikhon on January 11, 1966, at the Hermitage of the Holy Cross, of the monastery of Stavronikita.

Lung Surgery

As a young monk, the Elder suffered from lung problems. Even as far back as his time at Esphigmenou, he had internal

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129. In taking the Schema, the candidate makes a series of promises before God, his spiritual father, and the community as a whole. Specifically, he renounces the world and that which is in it, according to the Lord's commandment; and he promises that he will remain permanently in his monastery, that he will be obedient to the abbot and the rest of the community, that he will endure all afflictions and deprivations that accompany monastic life, and that he will keep himself in virginity, chastity, and devotion to God. Finally, the priest reads the Catechism, which describes in greater detail the life upon which the candidate is embarking; and the candidate gives his assent to all that has been said.

The promises made in taking the Small and Great Schema are identical, though the Catechism is longer in the latter case. This may be what the elder is speaking of; or he may, at this point, be speaking of both the Small and Great Schemas.—eds.

bleeding and would cough up blood, so much so that he would have to spend time in the monastery infirmary. He would suffer from this for the rest of his life. It was the lung-problems that he had while at Philotheou that had forced him to leave Mount Athos and go out into the world for treatment. And it was the same illness, made worse by a lack of oxygen, that had forced him to abandon Mount Sinai.

He himself didn't know exactly what this illness was. One of the doctors wrongly diagnosed him as having tuberculosis. And so, in obedience, he took hundreds of pointless streptomycin shots. His muscles became as hard as a rock, to the point that on one occasion the needle actually bent on contact with them. Even so, the Elder remained unshakable and insensible to his pain. A reverent doctor named George Daikos was the first to make the correct diagnosis: bronchiectasis.[130] "May God forgive Daikos," the Elder would say, offering the traditional Athonite* expression of gratitude.[131]

His illness got worse and worse, and he was forced to go in for tests, which showed that he was undeniably in need of an operation. The surgery took place at the Thoracic Disease Center of Northern Greece. Nearly his entire left lung was removed, along with two ribs. In a letter from the hospital's surgical unit, dated December 10, 1966, the Elder described the surgery: "It was a very serious operation. They removed

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130. Bronchiectasis is a widening of the airways in the lungs. The airways, damaged and enflamed, collect excess mucus and become prone to infection. Symptoms include chronic coughing, shortness of breath, weakness, weight loss, and fatigue. —eds.

131. "May God forgive him," which is to say, as it were, "May God look on his good deed and forgive him any sins he has committed." —eds.

the left lobe as well as part of the right... Surgery lasted about ten hours. There was continuous bleeding during the surgery, which made things difficult. They had to give me eight pints of blood... The rubber [drainage] hoses were removed after nine days, which made it very difficult for me to breathe. So they were forced do surgery again, for two hours, to put them back in place, where they stayed for another twenty days. The surgery also damaged my eyesight. My right eye has good vision, but my left is a bit closed and just has moderate vision. It doesn't matter to me—some people are born completely blind."

"The truth is that I'm suffering a lot, but it's worth it for one to pay this way even if he weren't ill, and to go through martyrdom like this, because it's helped me a lot.

"Before, I just read the Holy Scriptures about the Passion of our Lord like you would read a story. The same goes for the lives of the Saints. Now I'll feel what I read, because I've felt a little pain. Twenty-five days have gone by without the pain letting up."

As the hospital records note, "He was treated at the Thoracic Disease Center of Northern Greece. He entered on August 4, 1966, suffering from bronchiectasis of the lower left lobe of the lung, and was discharged on December 15, 1966. He was operated on and discharged in health."

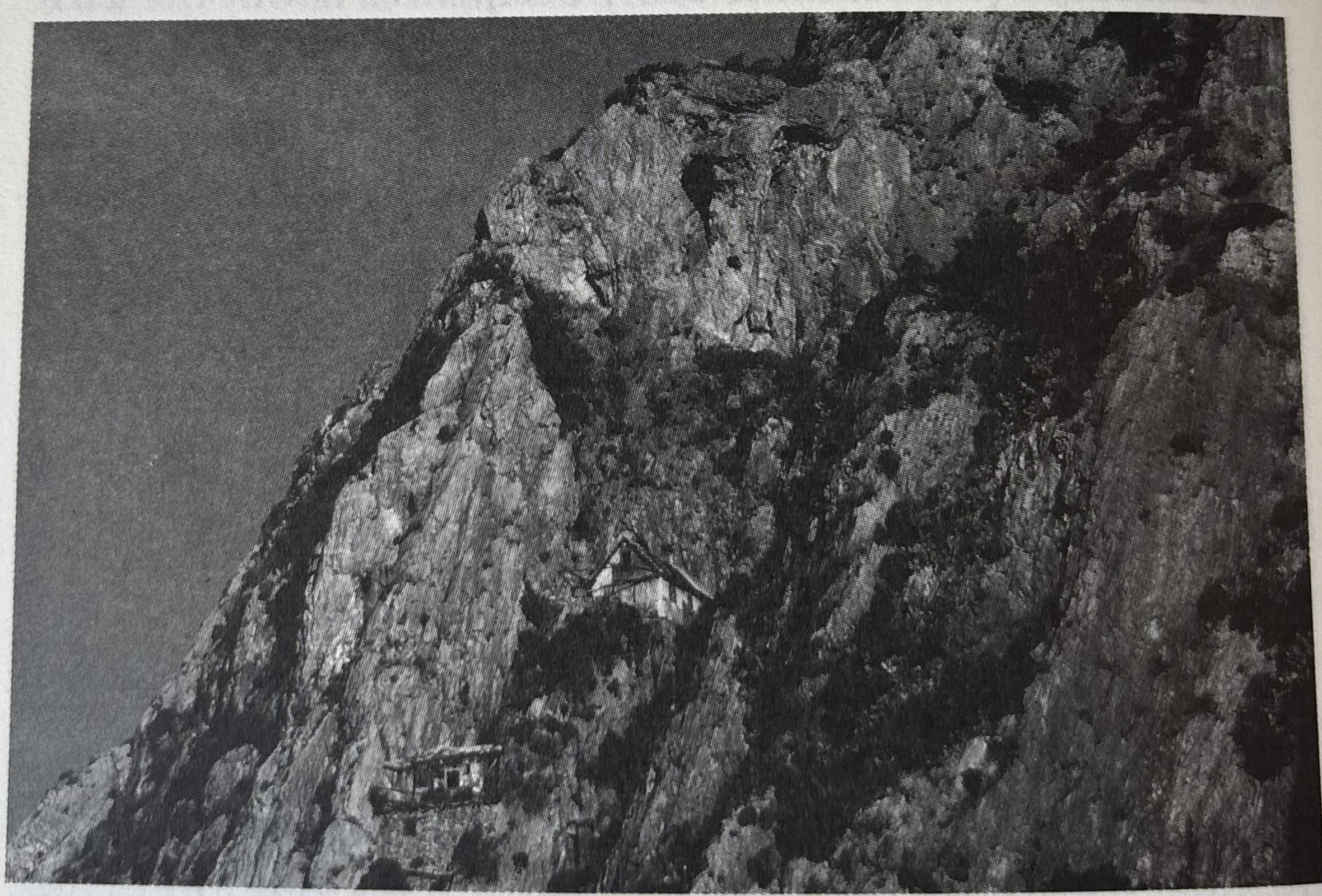
During the Elder's treatment at the hospital,[132] he was obedient to the doctors and ate meat.

It was at this time, on August 10, 1966, that his father according to the flesh reposed. As soon as the Elder found out,

132. In Asvestochori, a village outside of Thessaloniki.

he opened the Horologion and read Psalm 118.[133] When he finished, a nearby patient told him that he too had just learned of the repose of a relative, and the Elder repeated the psalm.

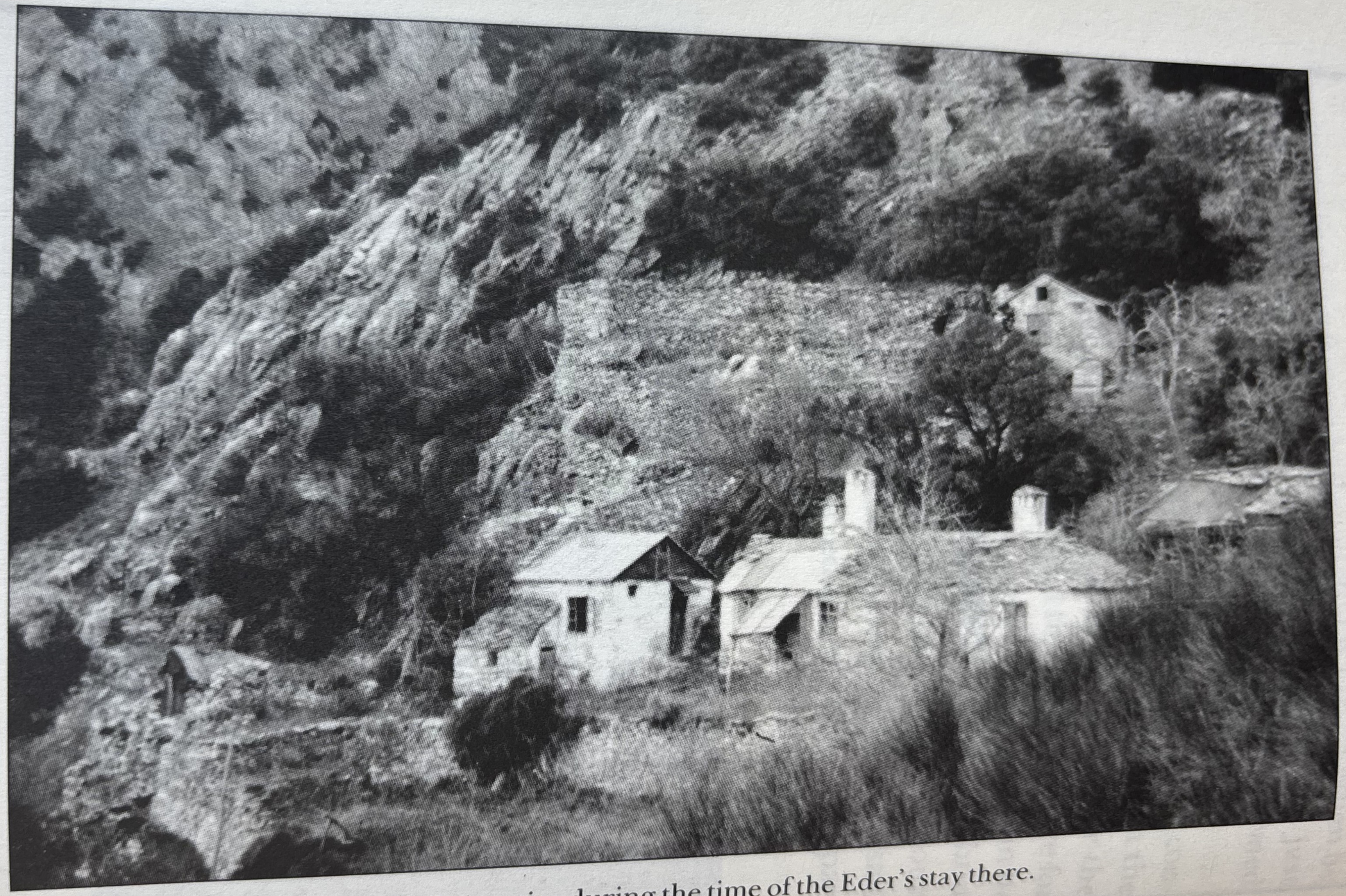
Returning from the hospital to the skete, the Elder continued his noble and magnanimous struggle. Life in the skete, with its communal life and distractions—for the number of fathers had grown—ignited the Elder's desire for greater stillness. Furthermore, because of his operation he had to move to a dry climate. His Elder, Papa-Tikhon, counseled him to go to Katounakia, in the desert of Mount Athos. "I have to be to be obedient to the Elder," he said; and so, on July 11, 1967, he received his release and departed for Katounakia.



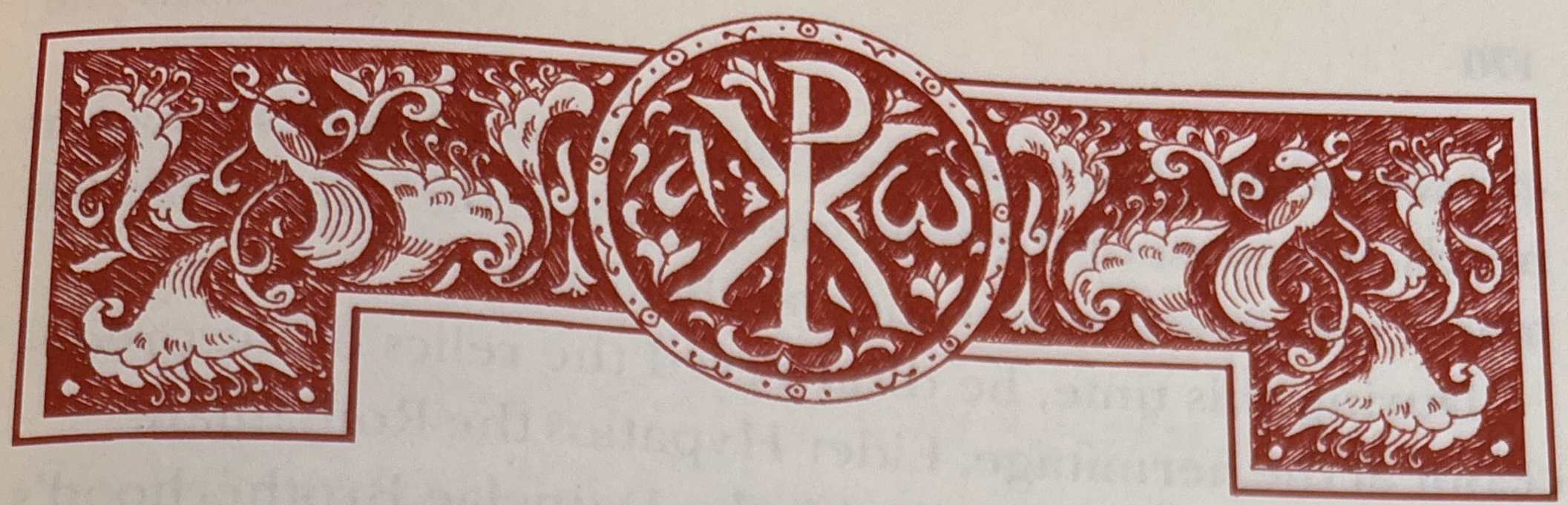
The vertical crags of Mount Athos, the ascetical Karoulia.

133. This psalm is appointed to be chanted at the memorial and funeral services.—Trans.

In Remote Katounakia



The Cell of Hypatios during the time of the Eder's stay there.



At the Poor Hermitage of Hypatios

For the sake of his beloved stillness, and because of his weakened health, Father Paisios settled in the Vlakhika area of Katounakia at the Hermitage of Hypatios, above the Danielae Brotherhood.

In one of his letters, dated September 18, 1967, he wrote, "Glory to God, I'm very well. I don't have trouble breathing because I can open the window by day or at night, since there's no humidity here. And I don't even have a neighbor."

His hermitage was a poor one, without a chapel, which had one little well and two or three little terraces in and around it. Not too far away was another small hermitage, made from sheet metal. This was a special blessing, because it had been the home of a blessed elder named Father Ephraim.[134] The Elder often spent time there, praying and being aware of the area's grace. About a hundred yards above was a cave which in earlier times had been a den of thieves, where Elder Ephraim had also lived for a time.

His life in Katounakia was quiet, undistracted, and impoverished. He would carve a scene from the Crucifixion, with the Theotokos and John the Theologian, on pieces of

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134. See *Athonite Fathers*, pp. 109–110, where he is identified as "Elder Ephraim the 'Wretch'" [as this is how he described himself—eds.].

cypress wood. He sold a few of them to meet his meager needs, but most of them he gave away as blessings. He also made, and gave away, wooden relief icons.

During this time, he disinterred the relics of his predecessor at the hermitage, Elder Hypatios the Romanian.

The Elder also helped with the Danielae Brotherhood's feast-day celebrations. A father from Kavsokalyvia who was among those serving was greatly impressed by this unknown monk, who served with great agility, doing the work of two or three monks at once, in silence and with prayerfulness, without showing the slightest sign of fatigue.

Once, the Elder boarded the boat which travels between Daphne and Katounakia. He went up to a certain monk who he had never met, made a humble bow before him, and called him by his name. It was Elder Gabriel, a great ascetic from Karoulia. Elder Gabriel was also glad to meet Father Paisios, because he had heard of an ascetic who lived in Vlakhika, and they sat side-by-side and discussed spiritual matters with sincere love and affection. In Katounakia, he also met other fathers who had reached the spiritual heights.

As the Elder himself recounted, the stillness he desired was lost because of visitors: "I was fresh from surgery when I returned to Katounakia, and people started to visit me. I would spend whatever time they needed with them, and then I would wish them a good journey and send them on their way. They would set out, but then a little while later, they would come back. 'We're going to stay here tonight,' they would tell me, and they would sit down again. So there I was, having to cook for them, prepare their beds, and so on. Where was I going to find the strength to take care of them? What I went through! I was in pain, and my medicine didn't

help. Still, I said 'glory to Thee, O God, Who has let me feel a tiny bit of what the holy martyrs felt.'"

Undershirts for an Ascetic

The Elder would visit elderly or infirm fathers, bringing them blessings such as clothes and food. One of the elderly fathers didn't want to take anything from anyone, and he had a note written on the door of his cell, which read, "Do not disturb me. I am old and sick." But Father Paisios succeeded in getting him to accept what he wanted to give him: "Keep them, elder," he told him. "You're both sick and old."

One day he visited elder Savvas of Katounakia and distributed some blessings to him. As he left, he asked him if he needed anything else, and elder Savvas replied that he needed some undershirts. On his way back to his hermitage, Elder Paisios met a visitor who was coming to see him and had brought him a package. The elder opened it and marveled at the providence of God: inside the package were undershirts. He immediately went back to elder Savvas to give them to him.

A Demon-possessed Man

"I was going up to the hermitage," the Elder once recalled, "weighed down with quite a lot of things. I ran across a layman from Trikala, who offered to help me. The poor man was possessed by a demon, who would send him into fits and throw him down on the ground as we walked. I made the sign of the Cross over him using the cross on my prayer-rope. The possessed man grabbed my right hand

and nearly broke it. Then I took my prayer-rope with my left hand and made the sign of the Cross over him again, saying: 'In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, come out of him, unclean spirit!' He calmed down right away and asked my forgiveness.

"And the Elder added in awe, 'The prayer-rope has amazing power, simply amazing!'"

Cutting a Gordian knot

The testimony of an anonymous priest: "In 1968, when I was still a seminary student, I made a visit to the Elder. I had a huge problem – it was just unbearable. I had decided on the celibate life after being given a one-sided presentation of the matter and receiving mistaken guidance. Trustingly, I opened my heart to the Elder. He listened to me attentively, and when I finished he said to me, 'Listen, my boy. A carpenter makes his best furniture with the best wood. A smith does the same thing when he makes furniture – he only uses the best iron. You need to take a close look at yourself, my boy, and see what you're made of. Don't go to a smith if you're made of wood – he uses a torch, and you'll get burned. You should only go to a smith if you're made of iron.'

"I had been so confused – and from then on I felt such relief. The Elder had used such a simple and wise example to cut the Gordian knot that had bound me for years. I left full of joy, convinced that there was a path opening for me on the horizon. I was now confident that I could follow what God had shown me through the Elder, without feeling guilty that I was betraying what I thought was the ideal of the

celibate life. The Elder's intervention decisively affected the rest of my life."

Poverty

One day, as he was sitting in the yard of his poor hermitage, he realized that someone was hiding in the forest and watching him. It seemed as though he were looking for a chance to steal something.

The Elder thought about it and said to himself, "The poor man must need something." So he immediately got up and left, leaving the front door of his hermitage open. The thief entered easily, but unfortunately for him there was nothing worth taking. The only things in the room were a straw mattress and a few practically worthless items. "Even though the thief was like a wild man," the Elder recalled, "he was moved to compunction, and later he brought me some supplies." Repentant, the man asked forgiveness, which the guileless Elder gave willingly and with all his heart.

"I Eat all the Time"

One day Father Daniel of the Danielae Brotherhood visited the Elder. He knocked on the door, saying "Through the prayers of our holy fathers," as was the custom, but there was no answer for quite awhile. Finally, the Elder opened the door. He was drenched in tears, and in his hands he held an onion and dry bread, which he was eating.

"What are you doing Father Paisios?" asked Father Daniel.

"What can I do, Father?" replied the Elder. "See—I'm eating. I eat all the time." And as he said this, he kept eating

the onion and the bread rusk while tears ran down his face.

Father Daniel, who told us this story, understood what was happening and explained it to us. It seems that Father Paisios had been in a state of great contrition, so much so that he couldn't contain his tears. He tried to force himself to stop when he heard Father Daniel's voice, since he had to open the door. But in the end he couldn't hold back the tears, so he created the scene with the onion to try and explain it away.

A Most-sweet Light

The Elder had divine experiences at Katounakia. "Once," he related, "as I was saying the prayer in the middle of the night, great joy welled up within me. I continued to say the prayer, and suddenly my entire cell was filled with light. It was white with a slight tint of light-blue. My heart beat sweetly. I continued to say the prayer with the prayer-rope until the sun came up. The light was so bright! It was brighter than the light of the sun—the sunshine was nothing in comparison. I looked at the sun and its light seemed washed-out to me, like the light of the full moon. I saw the light for quite awhile. Afterward, when the light dissipated, and the grace with it, I couldn't find consolation or joy anywhere. I had fallen from a higher state to a lower one, so I looked at myself like an animal. I went to eat, to drink some water, to do my handiwork, and I felt like an animal. I had completely forgotten this experience, and then I remembered it the day before yesterday,[135] when a reverent

135. The elder gave this account on June 23, 1984.

lawyer who practiced noetic prayer reminded me of it, since he had lived a certain state of grace..."

The Elder did not specifically identify the light he saw as uncreated, but there can be no doubt that it was indeed the Uncreated Light. All he added to the description was to say that "you can see it with your eyes closed and with your eyes open, at night in the darkness and during the day in the sunlight."

Such were the spiritual consolations with which divine grace comforted the ascetic Paisios, struggling with self-denial in voluntary poverty, in the uninviting desert of Katounakia.

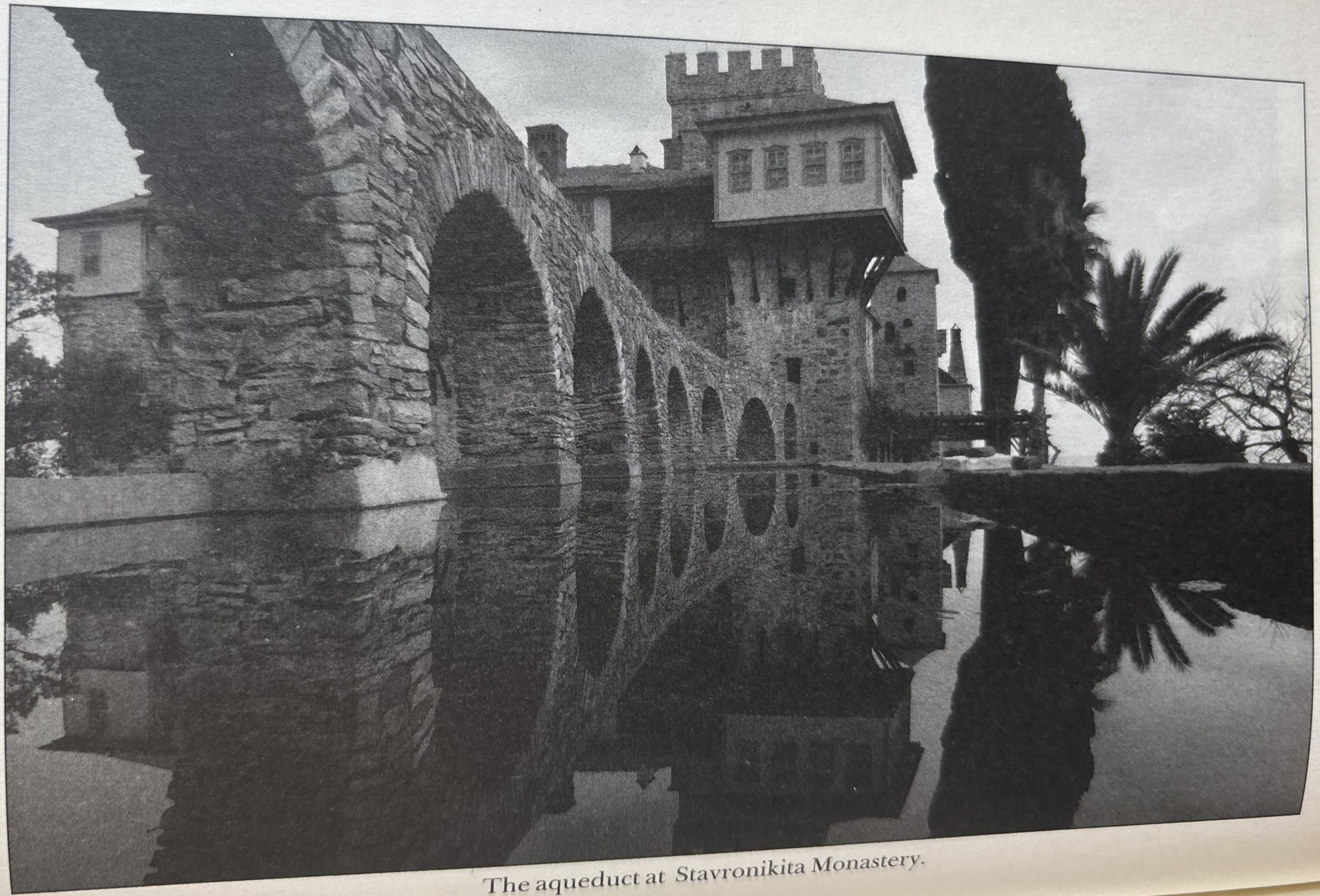
The Founding of a Women's Monastery

While in the hospital the Elder was introduced to a few reverent young women who were particularly attracted to monasticism. They visited him and donated blood when it was needed during the operation. Being indebted to them, the Elder would later help them spiritually in every way he could. He used to say that he was in their debt so much from their kindness, that he wanted to pay it back like he would want to take off a hair-shirt. And so he helped them find a place to live the monastic life. Thus began the founding of the monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti*, Thessaloniki, a convent which is now well-known in Greece. He continued to guide and help them spiritually to the day of his repose; and it was at Souroti that he would leave his much-fatigued body. He received blood from the sisters, and in return he provided them with the spirit—that is, with spiritual help.

The icon of Panagia Axion Estin [It is trully meet]

Protaton, Karyes, Mount Athos.

At the Hermitage of the Holy Cross



The aqueduct at Stavronikita Monastery.

At the Monastery of Stavronikita

The Holy Community of Mt. Athos invited the hieromonks Basil and Gregory from the Skete of Iveron to revive the monastery of Stavronikita, which at the time was idiorhythmic and had dwindled to a few monks. The two monks asked Elder Paisios's advice on the matter, and he told them to accept, adding, "I'll come too and help as much as I can." And so, after one year of ascetic life in the desert of Katounakia, on August 12, 1968, the Elder arrived at the monastery of Stavronikita.[136]

In a letter composed a few months later,[137] he writes, "You've already learned about the change in place and way of life. I mean, the change from the desert to the monastery and from total freedom from care to cares and responsibilities. I know you'll pray that I won't stay long here, so I can find my scattered self again. Of course, I couldn't avoid the move. I hope that in the spring everything will be in order and I will be free to pray for you constantly, because now, what with the concerns of the monastery, I'm not even fulfilling my basic duties."

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136. He received his (overdue) release papers from the Great Lavra, the monastery to which his cell at Katounakia belonged, on November 6, 1968.

137. On October 11, 1968.

Because the needs there were so great, the Elder helped with every task. He would start, and the others would follow. Since there weren't enough monks, he had to accept membership in the abbot's council.

The Repose of Father Tikhon

In the meantime, Father Paisios's Elder, the Russian ascetic Father Tikhon, was nearing his end. After a life filled with struggles and asceticism, he was preparing for everlasting life.

During his last ten days, he asked for his disciple Father Paisios, who later wrote the following: "Those last ten days were God's greatest blessing, because, since I had the chance, for a little while, to live so close to him and to get to know him better, I was helped more than at any other time ... On the last night he had his hands on my head for three hours straight, then he blessed and embraced me for the last time."[138]

After foretelling his death, he fell asleep on September 10, 1968, having prepared his grave with his own hands.

To his good disciple, "sweet Paisios" as he called him, Father Tikhon left his blessing, and he promised to visit him every year. He also said, "We will be united by love unto the ages of ages, my child." He hoped that Father Paisios would be his successor, telling him, "If you come and live in this cell, it will be a joy to me, but whatever God wants, my son."[139]

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138. *Athonite Fathers*, p. 49.

139. *Ibid*, p. 49.

Indeed, on March 2, 1969, after having helped put matters in order for the newly established brotherhood, for the sake of stillness the Elder moved to the Hermitage of the Holy Cross. He considered it a great blessing to live and struggle in the same place that his holy Elder had lived the ascetic life. It moved and inspired him, because of the special grace it possessed from the superhuman struggles of Father Tikhon and from the holy events that had taken place there.

Free from his community responsibilities, and with the blessing and example of his Elder to sustain him, he delighted in the sweetness of stillness and in communion with God, and he prayed for the salvation of the world and that he might live in obscurity. In a letter dated April 10, 1969, he wrote, "Now that I've been freed from the monastery by the grace of God, and I find myself in sweet stillness (which is mystical prayer on its own), I'll remember you more often, and, [even] from very far away, I'll be very close to you. Pray that I'll disappear from the scene, and that other people won't find me, because that's the only way I'll accomplish my mission. It's true: when I hide away, then I feel myself draw near to the troubled world."

However, despite the fact that he was hidden away, buried in Father Tikhon's hermitage – his "pit" – the Elder's presence caused several young men to join the community at Stavronikita in order to have the chance to see him and seek advice. In a short time, the number of fathers there increased, and they became a close-knit coenobitic community. From his ascetic's cell, Elder Paisios took an interest in the progress of the monastery and quietly tried to direct it in the footsteps of the Church fathers.

His Life at Holy Cross

On the way from Stavronikita to Karyes, slightly beyond a shrine on the left of the road, a footpath started. It ran through a low forest of strawberry trees and heather, ascending and descending, until it reached a hermitage enclosed by a chain-link fence. Next to the door was a box with a slit, like a mailbox, bearing a note which read, approximately, the following: "Write down what you would like us to talk about and put it in the box. More will be gained from prayer than conversation." A wire running above the enclosure would ring a bell to alert the Elder to visitors.

The spacious yard was covered with olive trees and a few vines. In front of the entrance to the yard was a large pile of wood, arranged by the Elder so he wouldn't be seen when he walked between his cell and his workshop. Beyond that, under an olive tree on the right, was a small table and two or three roughly-made chairs, where he would receive visitors in the summer. To the left was the tomb of Father Tikhon, where the Elder had planted rosemary, so that it wouldn't be stepped on.

The cell was sunk into the ground. Having crossed the yard, the pilgrim would descend a staircase of three or four steps to come level with it. Before him was the front door; behind him the stairs and a low stone retaining wall, which wrapped around the cell. The gap between the building and the wall formed a passageway around the cell, with gates to prevent drafts. In this passageway, to the pilgrim's left, was a crude cooking area: set into the wall was a nook large enough to light a fire underneath a stew-pot. There was an awning over the front door.

The pilgrim, as he entered the structure, would find himself in an foyer one step wide and three steps long, lit by a small window. The Elder's cell was straight ahead, and on the left was the hermitage's small Chapel of the Holy Cross. It had an iconostasis with three or four icons, a stall, a lectern, and nothing else. Everywhere there was striking simplicity.

A few yards to the west of the entrance was a door leading out to the Elder's workshop and reception area, and to his guest quarters: a small, poor hut with a low ceiling of straw and earth, containing two narrow beds with just enough room between them for a person to stand. Since the small hermitage didn't have much capacity for extending hospitality, the Elder, having his hesychastic prayer rule to keep, was selective in accepting guests, doing so only when he thought it needful. In a letter dated December 21, 1971, he writes: "I absolutely intend to offer you all my poor hospitality at my hermitage. And I'm at your service, not halfway—totally. Whenever you want, don't hesitate to ask (because if I see you hesitating, it'll upset me). It's just that now, in wintertime, my hermitage has room for only one person. Unfortunately, my hermitage and my heart don't agree."

East of the cell, there was a cistern for rainwater collected by gutters on the roof. This is what the Elder drank from and offered to visitors. Further on was an open, larger cistern for irrigation, but he didn't use it since he didn't have a garden.

Outwardly, his life there was roughly as follows: At night, he slept for two or three hours, waking near midnight. He kept vigil, and before dawn he rested a little while. During the day, if he didn't have visitors, he did handiwork, engraving small icons and crosses with his press. The rest of the

time, he studied, prayed, and answered his correspondence—he received letters from many, many people asking his prayers or seeking advice about serious problems. He wrote for hours during the day, and when it got dark he continued, using a candle. As time went on, the number of visitors he received increased greatly, and they kept him occupied for hours and hours with their problems. As he wrote once, "I was sick with a fever. The visitors made the fever worse, but on the other hand they kept me from dying—I never got the chance."

The Elder found himself in a dilemma: Should he stay, or should he return to Sinai or go somewhere else, for stillness? He didn't rush to decide. He prayed, so as not to do his own will, but God's, and he saw that the will of God was for him to stay. In a letter dated May 9, 1975, he wrote, "It looks like I'll be able to manage things here... In a few days, I'll put a wire fence around the area."

But the number of letters he received increased more and more. And so, around 1977, he decided that he would only answer urgent letters. He let a lot of people know, and they passed it on to others. "I set out to be a monk," he explained. "I can see that this is diverting me away from my goal." But he didn't stop praying for everyone who wrote him. On the contrary, he had cut back on his correspondence so he would have more time for prayer, which he believed was a monk's most important offering to the world.

His life was unimaginably simple, which gave him the strength to dedicate almost all of his time to spiritual matters and people with spiritual needs. During one period, for two days a week, Wednesday and Friday, he was a recluse and wouldn't open the gate for anyone. He fasted, prayed,

and did refined spiritual work on himself. He also had a tiny, roughly-made cell with a sheet-metal roof, in the woods toward the stream, near a small spring, and sometimes he would go there for greater silence. After he had spent time shut inside his cell, or had been away, he would collect the notes left by visitors and pray for them from the heart.

Usually, he attended liturgy and communed at the monastery. During some periods, however, he chanted the Divine Liturgy in his small chapel or went here and there, to cells that he knew, to take part in the Divine Liturgy.

He gathered olives, and sometimes he produced a little oil for the lamps in the church, with a crude oil-press he had designed and constructed himself. He also gave olives to the poor ascetics and elders of Kapsala, whom he would visit for edification and to help in whatever way he could.

Once, the Elder had a young acquaintance as a guest. Toward evening, he cooked some food—something he seldom did, except on the rare occasions that he hosted someone. Crushing some lentils in a pot, he added the right amount of water and a little rice. Then he lit the fire, using a small bundle of kindling made of the area's abundant heather and shrub. Then he sat a little ways off from the food, and they talked. As the discussion went on, the young man thought that the Elder, absorbed in the conversation, had forgotten about the food. But in a little while it was ready: his cooking was so simple that the food hadn't even needed stirring.

They prayed with their prayer-ropes in place of vespers. The young man was in the small chapel and the Elder in his cell, where he also read the Theotokarion*. Afterward, he set the table, counseling and admonishing the young man with fatherly love all the while. Although the Elder hadn't

used any oil, the food was delicious. When he said the prayer before the meal, his calm contrition made an impression on his visitor: the Elder conducted himself as though he were detached from earthly things and stood before Christ. After the meal, he went out to feed the wild animals, calling each by name.

At sundown, they spent an hour in the garden, apart, praying with their prayer-ropes. Afterward, when the Elder had settled his visitor in the small reception area, he withdrew to his cell.

In this poor hermitage in Kapsala, the Elder practiced asceticism – in the deepest pit but with an exalted way of life in unceasing prayer, alone with God and nourished by His grace. Deprived of leisure and material things, he was rich in virtue and divine grace. Exhausting himself in ascetic efforts, he gave to others spiritual rest. Suffering for men's sins and pain, he transfused into them joy and consolation. He wrestled with demons, conversed with saints, befriended the wild animals, and aided his fellow man – as we shall see from the following typical reports.

"A Light unto my Paths"[140]

The Elder recalled: "I was at [Stavronikita monastery] one evening. As I was leaving, I came across a layman who wanted to speak to me, outside the monastery gate. He started to tell me about his problems. It got late, and I was sick – it was the kind of thing where I couldn't sit and rest, and I couldn't stand up straight. Anyway, it got later as he spoke to

140. Ps. 118:109 (Ps. 119:105).

me, and finally it got dark. For a second, I thought about how I was sick, and I wanted to stop. But then I said to myself, 'He's got so many problems. Should I be thinking about myself?' And so he kept talking, and he didn't finish until it was pitch-black. The monastery gate had been locked, but he had somewhere to sleep – some cell he knew about.

"I took the trail going back to the hermitage. I started down the footpath, and there's a part that's narrow and steep. I didn't even have a flashlight with me, so when I reached it I couldn't see, and I fell into some branches and bramble and got stuck. I couldn't see a thing, and my knapsack was up around my head. 'What should I do?' I thought. 'I'll say Compline.' I started with the Trisagion. A moment later there was a powerful light – my head was glowing like a light bulb! It was like day all around me! I saw where I was, and I scrambled up and moved on. The light kept shining around me. My heart was full of heavenly exultation. I got back to the hermitage, got the key from where I kept it, went into the church, and I lit the lamps; and then the light faded away."

The Elder Helps a New Monk

"I met Elder Paisios," relates Father Nicholas Trigonas the Athonite*, "when he was still at Stavronikita. When I went in October 1968, he was there. While he was at the monastery he chanted and helped everywhere. Afterward he went to Papa-Tikhon's hermitage.

"When I had temptations[141] at Stavronikita I would visit

141. Here, the word "temptation" is used in its broader Orthodox sense, to

him. 'I'll pray,' he would tell me. He had great boldness in his prayer. For three or four days after that I would be calm. Other times, my temptations would disappear as soon as I arrived at his cell.

"He kept me near him for a month, until Father Paul Zissakis, my spiritual father, arrived. Every night at midnight, he would get up and set his alarm clock to go off in three hours. He would say the prayer and lose himself in it, and his nous would be caught up into divine vision. Later, when the alarm clock rang, he would also wake me up, and call me to church for the service. The Elder would then say the Six Psalms* and do the rest of the service with the prayer-rope. He did a lot of prostrations. In the morning we drank something. The Elder would work at the press, and I would cook. Not many people were coming to him back then. One day, three Catholic monks came to ask him about the Jesus prayer. He told me to make them some pasta. He offered them the food and then spoke to them.

"I too would ask him about noetic prayer. He would tell me, 'Try to say the prayer, and it will teach you.'

"Another time he sent me to another hermitage on some errand, and I was late coming back. He was worried, so he came to find me, and he was praying on the road. As soon as I saw him, in the distance, I hid in the bearberry bushes. When he came closer, I saw his face shining brightly. Later it went back to normal.

"One day he went to Stavronikita, attended Liturgy, and communed. When he returned, I opened the door for him,

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signify any inner or outer event or circumstance that might disturb one's spiritual peace, serving as a diversion from union with Christ. – eds.

and I saw his eyes, brilliant in the darkness.

"Another time I played a prank without telling him about it. He said to me, 'Go and do a prostration before the Elder's grave' [that is, Papa-Tikhon's].

'What did I do?' I asked.

'You know.'

"Years later, at the funeral of Deacon Dionysios Firfiris, I saw his face shining. He was a venerable soul."

Fish from God

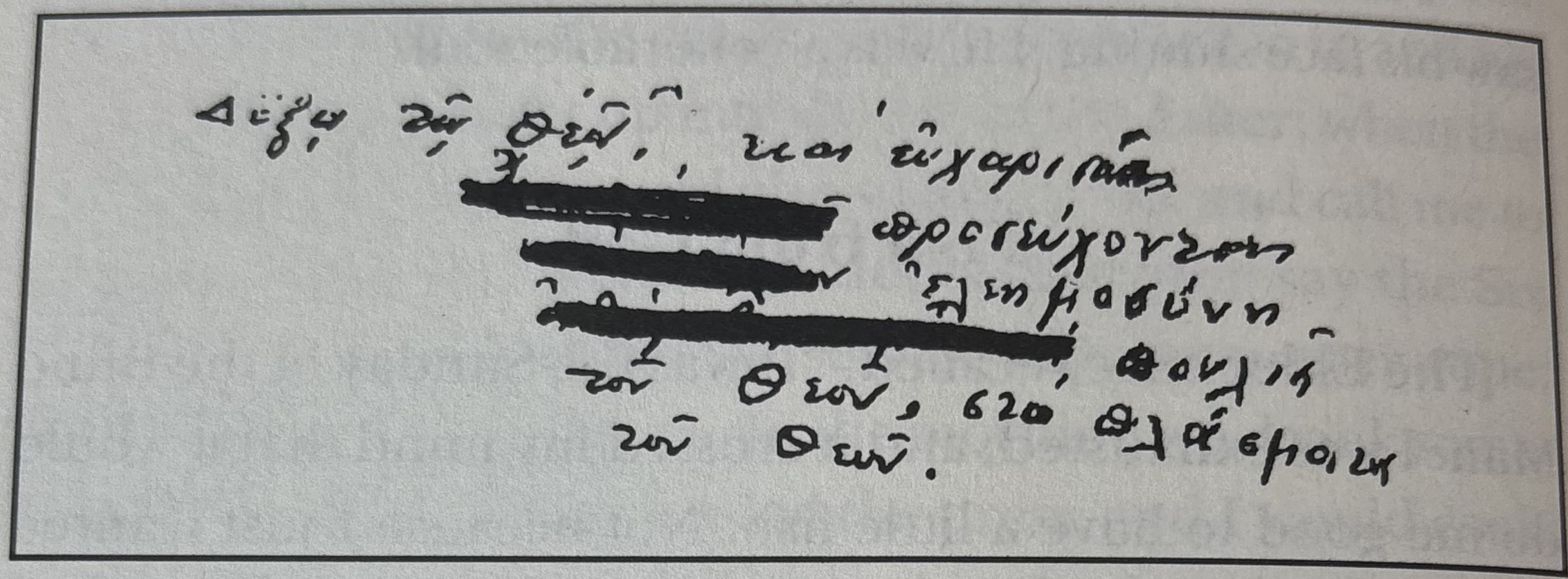
The Elder once recalled: "It was the Sunday of the Blind Man. I was exhausted, and it crossed my mind that it would do me good to have a little fish. Not because I just wanted it—I thought it would be good for me as a medicine. I had problems with my intestines, too. I went to go outside, and, as I turned around, I saw a bird swoop down—big, like an eagle. I ducked so it wouldn't hit me. I was afraid that maybe it was something from the devil, so I didn't pay it any mind, and I went back inside my cell.

"In a little while, I needed to go outside again. Right where I had ducked, I saw a large fish flopping around. I crossed myself and thanked God, and then I took the fish. But then, who has the heart to eat it?

To remember the event, and to commemorate always the providence of God, on the upright headboard of his bed the Elder made an artful image of an eagle with a large fish in its claws. He also wrote a description of the incident in his copy of the *Pentecostarion*,[142] in the margin of the service for the

142. That is, the service-book for the period from Pascha through the Sunday

Sunday of the Blind Man. Later, out of humility, he cut it out to keep people from learning about what had happened. But, because there was printing on the opposite side of the page, he had to leave part of what he had written. He crossed out several of the words to obscure the meaning, but what he wrote can be made out with some effort:



That is, "Glory to God, and thanks [to those who] pray [and silently send] alms [by the] birds of God to His creatures."[143]

An appearance of Saint Arsenios

On February 21, 1971, the Elder was sitting in the yard of his hermitage, proofreading his manuscript of the life of Saint Arsenios. "It was two hours to sunset," he records, "and, as I was reading, Father Arsenios visited me. He patted me on the head, like a teacher might with a pupil who's done well at his lessons. At the same time, he left me with an inexpressible sweetness and heavenly exultation in my heart,

after Pentecost. – eds.

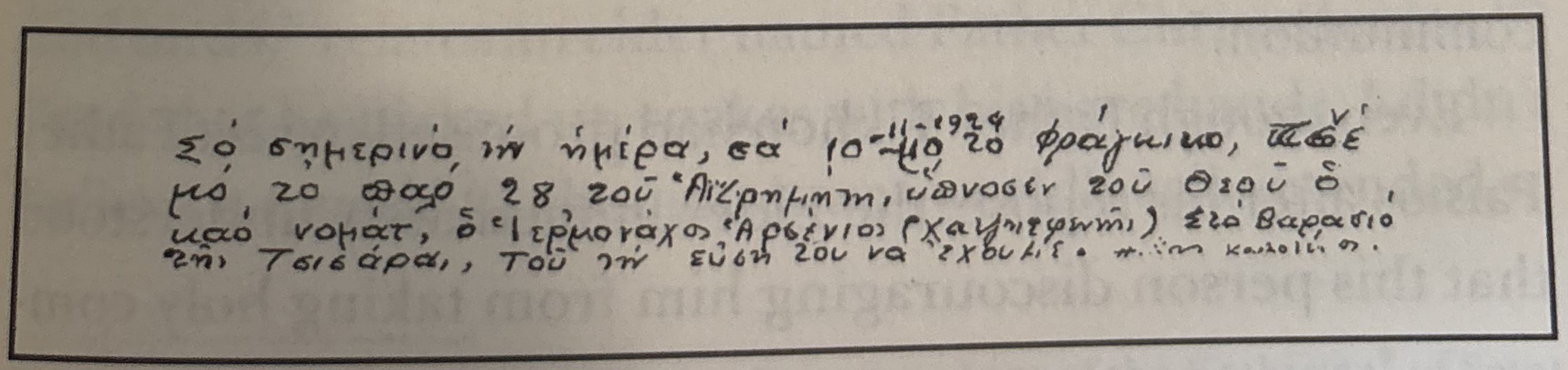
143. The crossed-out text is indicated by brackets.

which was impossible for me to bear. Afterwards, I ran outside around my cell like a madman and kept calling for him, imagining that I could find him."[144]

The appearance of the Saint left him deeply moved. He made a pencil-sketch, and the sisters at Souroti painted an icon. But, as the Elder recalled, "the first icon didn't look like Saint Arsenios very much. So I sat down with them and told them to paint it like this and like that." This second version, which entirely captures the Saint's features, would become the most well-known icon of Saint Arsenios in Greece.

The Elder had an unshakable belief in the holiness of Saint Arsenios. Still, he told the sisters not to put a halo on the icon, and he placed it, not on the icon-stand with the icons of the canonized saints, but below them. When he was asked why, he replied, "Let it move up on its own if it wants to do so"—meaning that they should let the Saint himself bring about his canonization. In the same way, he didn't put a halo on the printing-plates he used to make icons of the Saint, and he titled the biography he wrote Father Arsenios the Cappadocian He waited for the Church to recognize him as a Saint formally, only then adding a halo to the icons and re-titling the book Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian.

Before the canonization, in his personal Menaion* for October 28, the Elder had written the following, in the Farasan dialect:



144. *Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian*, p. 43.

That is, "Today, November 10, 1924 on the new calendar, and October 28 on the old calendar, the good man of God, Hieromonk Arsenios (Hadjiefendis) from Farasa in Caesarea, fell asleep. May we have his blessing. Monk Paisios."

Father Tikhon and the Temptation

In *Athonite Fathers and Athonite Matters*, Father Paisios describes his relationship with Elder Tikhon after the Elder's repose: "The first time [that he appeared to me] was on September 10, 1971, in the night after the midnight office. While I was saying the Jesus Prayer, I suddenly saw the Elder come into the cell! I leapt up and embraced his feet, which I kissed with reverence. I didn't know how, but somehow he freed himself from my arms, and, as he was leaving, I saw that he went into the chapel and disappeared."[145]

Once, the Elder was considering going to the monastery of Stavronikita to receive communion. That day, a lot of people had come to see him, and he hadn't had time to say his prayers and prepare himself as he would have liked to. Because of that, he wasn't sure whether he should commune or not. At that moment, he saw someone who looked like Father Tikhon on the stairway in front of him. The figure wrinkled up his nose and shook his head, saying, "Don't receive communion."

Even though Father Tikhon had promised to visit Father Paisios after his repose, the Elder immediately understood that this person discouraging him from taking holy com-

145. *Athonite Fathers*, pp. 50–52.

munion was actually the devil. "Get out of here," he replied—"you're not my elder." And he went to the monastery and received communion.

On the Island of Tinos

One year, during the Dormition fast, the Elder took a boat to venerate the famous icon of the Mother of God on Tinos. Seeing women lying half-naked on the deck, sunbathing, he was troubled. He thought, "How have God's images debased themselves so much?" Detaching himself from his surroundings, the Elder focused inwardly and prayed from his heart: "God, send rain so they'll have to cover up." And in a little while, clouds gathered, and it rained, making the women get dressed and go inside.

He reverently venerated the icon and returned swiftly; he didn't stay. Once, when someone asked him about his trip, he replied, "I'll just tell you one thing, and you'll get it: the icon of the Panagia is full of life."

On board the ship, he met the Archbishop of Athens, Hieronymos I, and they discussed the state of the Church.

Birds Become Silent

"We had heard that Father Paisios spoke with animals and birds," relates an elder named Father Christodoulos,[146] "and that he picked up snakes with his bare hands. I didn't believe it myself—I thought it was worldly talk intended to

146. Hieromonk Christodoulos Kapetas, elder of the Kathisma* of Saint Eleutherios, belonging to the Skete of Saint Anne.

make a name for the Elder. When I graduated from the Athonite School* in 1971, at the beginning of July, I visited him at the Hermitage of the Holy Cross with a spiritual brother of mine, Constantine Lytras, from Katerini. We arrived there at about 9:30 in the morning, and the Elder received us in the outdoor guest area, at the olive tree. After he had treated each of us to a dried fig, two or three hazelnuts, and some water, he started to speak to us about spiritual matters.

"The area had a lot of singing birds, primarily nightingales, and the noise was bothersome—it made it difficult to have a conversation. At one point, we heard the Elder address them. 'Hush now' he said—he didn't say, be quiet!—'you can see we're having a discussion. When we finish, you can start again.' The birds immediately obeyed, staying right where they were.

"We were so impressed that we couldn't follow the rest of the conversation. It was also a secret answer to my doubts about the Elder. May he forgive me for mentioning this after his repose. I ask for his blessing."

A Deluded Monk

Once, a deluded monk visited the Elder. He had given himself an obedience never to drink water. Delusion is a serious matter, and it is only with great difficulty that a person can be cured of it. The Elder discerned a way to help the man. "I offered him lumps of delight and water," Father Paisios told us.

He said, "I don't drink water." I knew he was in delusion. I said to him, "I didn't say drink the whole glass. Just take a

sip if you want." I knew what would happen, so I had a bucket of water ready.

He lifted his glass for just that one sip, and that was that: he drank the whole thing in a single gulp. He asked for another glass, and another, like he was on fire. By the time he stopped, he had drunk almost the whole bucket.

The rule that the deluded monk had given himself came from pride, and – naturally – he received demonic help in carrying out his self-centered rule. But, once he obeyed and was humbled by taking the one sip, the demonic assistance ceased, and he could no longer keep his self-imposed rule.

Suffering with the Sick

Father Athanasios of Stavronikita first met the Elder at Sinai, where he had gone to live as a hermit.[147] Following him to the Holy Mountain, he finally entered the monastery of Stavronikita. He was a monk of the Great Schema, a member of the abbot's council, and the monastery's legal representative since he had studied law as a young man. The Elder had a particular love for him because of his obedience.

Once, Father Athanasios became ill and had to be admitted to the Municipal Hospital of Athens. Previously, he had had a tumor removed, a procedure that required the removal of one of his eyes. Now, his doctors determined that the tumor had spread extensively to his lungs. He had accumulated fluid around the lungs, and he often needed to

147. Father Athanasios was born in Corinth in 1930 and was known in the world as Euthymios Skliris, son of Nicholas and Euthymia, He joined the monastery of Stavronikita on December 2, 1968.

have it drained using a needle.[148] His breathing was labored, and he sometimes felt as though he were suffocating.

When the Elder learned of Father Athanasios's condition, he decided to travel to Athens to support him in his trial. A resident of Athens named Panagiotis had the blessing of hosting the Elder in his home for one month.[149] He described their time together: "The Elder arrived at my house late in the evening, and I put him in his own area in the apartment, where he would be able to move around without feeling like he was bothering me. My bedroom was separated from the room I put him in by a sliding glass door. But he didn't realize that, and so, without intending to, before falling asleep I shared in a large portion of his intense all-night supplication, offered to Christ and the Mother of God for Father Athanasios's healing.

"He must have had a vision that night, because, starting the next day, he spoke of Father Athanasios's departure as though he had received a clear answer to his insistent night-time entreaty. That morning, the Elder was surprised and appeared troubled when I mentioned that I slept in the adjoining room—as though he didn't want what had happened and what I had heard the night before to become known.

"That morning we went to the hospital, where Father Paisios met with Father Athanasios and began to do spiritual work among the sick and all who came and went in the infirmary. He met with the doctors and was informed of Father

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148. The medical term for the procedure is known as thoracentesis or pleural tap.—eds.

149. Panagiotis Drositis, Presiding Judge (emeritus) of the Greek Court of Appeals.

Athanasios's condition, and he advised the attending physicians to explain to him the seriousness of his situation in every detail and with full candor. Father Athanasios, upon learning the facts about his health at first became pensive and distraught. But thanks to his contact with the Elder and the spiritual support the Elder offered him, he quickly took heart—and, in spite of his constantly deteriorating condition, he was transformed from his moribund state into a fervent preacher of life.

"In the meantime, Father Paisios's daily presence at the hospital transformed the corridors, the stairwells, and the wards into true infirmaries for souls. Doctors, nurses, the sick, the healthy, and people of every age came to receive blessings, support, and answers to their problems. The Elder generously offered his love to everyone who came to him, and he actively sought out opportunities to be loving.

"I remember the Elder offering whatever he had to poor, sick people. He even anguished over and prayed for a young girl who had committed some moral misconduct. (Afterward, he was comforted by knowledge that he received from above, that this work of God's hand would follow the right path in the end.)

"Late in the evening he would return to the house, after a full day of fatigue and hardship, often continuing to see people, meeting with those who weren't able to see him at the hospital. I don't remember a single day that his tiredness and suffering were apparent. On the contrary, he was cheerful, displaying his well-known sense of humor. Each day, he would leave me pleasant notes, one of which I've kept, thanking me and keeping me in an atmosphere of joy.

"The Elder departed from Athens when he had satisfied

himself that the sick man had become stable, had progressed in faith, and, in spite of his bodily suffering, had been transformed into a light-filled preacher of life, sustaining and indeed cheering up both visitors and the sick in his own ward and in others. The Elder continued to communicate with him through warm letters, which he sent through me. I saved the last one, which arrived after Father Athanasios's death. Enclosed with it was a photograph of Father Tikhon."

Father Athanasios's falling asleep was as befits the Saints. Father Paisios described the arrival of his coffin at the dock of Stavronikita. The Elder said that his countenance was so joyous and peaceful that, if he hadn't felt shy in front of the bystanders, he would have cried out with joy, giving glory to our good God.

Father Athanasios's falling asleep in the Lord took place on May 6, 1972. The Elder would later recall the entire episode with the following words: "Father Athanasios fell ill some time ago with melanoma. Although he lived with it for years, it had spread, finally infecting his lungs and again requiring his hospitalization. I lived close to him, at a friend's house, for a month, and I went to see him twice a day. He died a little while after I left as I had forseen in a vision. In fact on the day that he fell asleep I said that he would die today. Afterward, they brought him to the monastery. When I saw him, I felt sad. It was sadness for the past, for the years we lived together, and for all the years we'll be separated until I depart as well. And when I kissed him for the last time, God permitted him to smile at me as a consolation."

Cassocks and an Olive Tree

At this time, people were discussing changing the way clergy dressed, and some clergymen wanted the Elder to bless them to stop wearing their cassocks. For example, one visiting priest insisted, "The cassock doesn't make the priest. It's better for clergy not to wear cassocks in public—then people can approach them more easily." He said other, similar nonsense as well, and the Elder couldn't convince him to the contrary. Finally, he told the priest, "Come back tomorrow, and I'll give you an answer."

That night he prayed, and when the priest returned in the morning, he showed him an olive tree he had stripped of its bark. At the top, he had left some trimmed branches, so that the tree looked a little like a priest with no cassock and just a small beard. "Do you like the tree like this, with no bark?" he asked the priest. "That's what clergy are like without cassocks." The priest left thanking the Elder, who with this simple example had made him discard his worldly ideas.

On the bare trunk of the olive tree, he carved the two rhymes, translated, "Priest cassockless—therefore prodigal,"[150] and, "The trees cast off their garb—we'll see what progress they'll make..."[151] Of course, the tree later died, but in the meantime many people were able to learn from it, and the Elder would use the vivid image to oppose anti-traditional tendencies in general.

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150. *"Papas arasotos, ara asōtos."*—Trans.

151. *"Ta dendra petaxan tēn stolē tous, tha doume tēn prokopē tous."* ("Cassocks" [stolē]: literally, clerical dress or vestments, in this context referring specifically to the cassock.)—Trans.

Years later, a well-intentioned prospective clergyman asked the Elder why clergy should wear cassocks. He replied, "There are a lot of reasons. But it's enough to say that it comforts reverent people to see their priests in cassocks."

In Farasa

When the Elder wrote Saint Arsenios's biography, his heart burned to go to Cappadocia to visit Farasa. God granted this desire: on October 29, 1972, with then-Abbot Basil of the Stavronikita monastery, he visited the village of his birth.

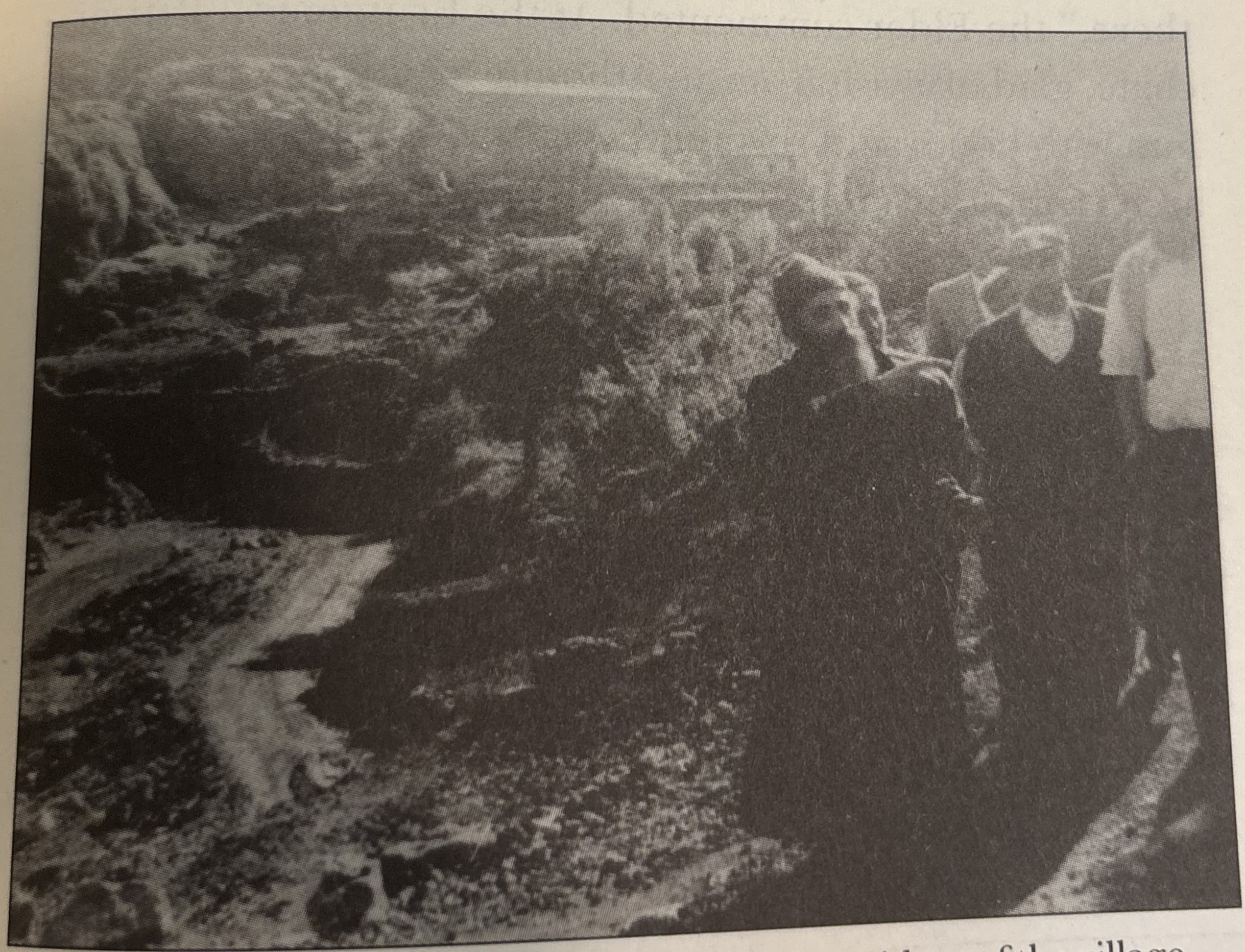
The Elder recorded various noteworthy events from the journey in Saint Arsenios's biography. He also related some other interesting details in person. On the way to Farasa they had stopped at a village shop and ordered something to eat. Nearly the whole village gathered around and looked out their windows. Before they ate, the Elder told the abbot to stretch out the mealtime prayer. They said prayers, crossing themselves constantly. "We said a whole canon," the Elder told us, laughing, "in order to give some joy to any secret Christians[152], the poor dears, that might be present."

When Turks asked them why they were traveling, the Elder told them frankly that he was a native of Farasa. At one point, a police officer decided that the Elder was suspi-

152. During the almost six centuries of Turkish rule, the Turks initiated many savage pogroms against the Christian population. Christians were given the choice of either being slain or becoming Muslims. Some chose Christianity and became New Martyrs. Others decided to become Muslims, although they were not necessarily fervent believers in Islam. There are various accounts that some decedents of these Muslims are still practicing Christianity in secret. – eds.

cious and arrested him. He put him in a holding-room and closed the door carelessly, leaving it unlocked, and then he went away. Hours passed, and no one came to question him, so the Elder told the abbot to find a taxi, and they left.

In Farasa, his soul ached when he saw that the church where Saint Arsenios had celebrated the Liturgy had been turned into a mosque. The village he saw looked quite different from the one his parents had described. Once the most prominent village in the area, it was now neglected, full of ruins and strewn with litter. Turks went with him everywhere. They didn't leave him by himself for a moment, and their suspicion and discomfort in his presence betrayed their knowledge that the land wasn't truly theirs.



The Elder with the school teacher and the president of the village during his visit in Farasa.

The fathers returned, via Ankara, to Constantinople. The Elder visited Hagia Sophia, venerating the church with emotion. Retiring to a corner, he prayed inwardly with an aching heart. A Turkish guard noticed him and started to yell at and threaten him. "Kemal [Ataturk]," he declared, "said neither one of us can pray here."[153] The Elder, not thinking at all of the danger, replied loudly and emphatically, exploding with holy fervor. Steering the guard behind a pillar where he had seen urine, he rebuked him indignantly: "What's this? Is this the kind of thing Kemal told you to do?" Retelling this story, the Elder added with certainty, "The wrath of God is going to straighten them out."

Later, they visited the Chora monastery and marveled at the exceptional mosaics. "You can see overflowing grace there," the Elder commented. At the Ecumenical Patriarchate, glad of a visit from an Athonite ascetic, they received him with honor and reverence. He was impressed by Patriarch Demetrios' (1972-1991) humility and patience.

A Soul in Hell

The Elder related: "I knew an old woman who was very stingy. Her daughter was very good, and whatever she wanted to give as alms she would throw out the window so she could leave the house with empty hands, because her mother would always check to see if she was taking anything. Then she would go pick up whatever it was and give it away. But if she told her mother that 'the monk' [that is, me] had asked

153. That is to say, Ataturk had decreed that Hagia Sophia was to be a historical monument, used for neither Christian nor Muslim devotions. —eds.

for something, then her mother would be willing to give it up.

"After her death,[154] I saw a young man [her guardian angel], and he said to me, 'Come—so-and-so wants you.' I couldn't understand what happened to me, but we were standing in front of a grave in Konitsa. He moved his hand, like this, and the grave opened. Inside, I saw a grimy mess and the old woman, who had started to decay. She was calling out, 'Monk, save me.'

"My heart went out to her. Feeling sorry for her, I climbed down inside and without being repulsed I embraced her and asked, 'What's wrong?'

"She said, 'Tell me, didn't I always give you anything you asked, willingly?'

"'Yes,' I said, 'that's true.'

"'All right,' said the young man, soothing her.

"He moved his hand like this again and closed the grave like a curtain, and I was back in my cell.

"The sisters from Souroti asked me, 'What happened to you on the feast of Saint Andrew?'[155] I answered, 'Pray for [so-and-so's] soul.'

"Two months later, I saw her again.[156] High above an abyss, there was a plateau with palaces, a lot of houses, and many people. The old woman was up there. She was very happy with the face of a small child that had just a tiny spot that her angel was also scrubbing to clean off. In the abyss, in the distance, I saw people being beaten and harassed, and trying to climb up.

154. Her repose took place on July 10, 1971.

155. That is, November 30, 1971.

156. On January 30, 1972.

"I embraced her out of joy. I took her aside a little, so the people in the abyss wouldn't see us and be hurt. She said to me, 'Come on, let me show you the place where the Lord has put me.'"

Saint Euphemia

Once, when one of the Elder's spiritual children visited him, he found the Elder in his yard, repeating with heart-felt fervor, "Glory to Thee, O God!" At one point during the visit, the Elder commented, "It makes one unfit for anything, but in a good way."

"Who, Elder?" asked his visitor.

"I was sitting quietly in my cell," he replied. "She came and left me speechless. They sure have it good up there."

"What happened, Elder?"

"I'll tell you," he replied, "but don't repeat it to anyone." Then he related the following: "I had returned from the world [that is, from outside Mt. Athos], where I had gone because of a Church matter. On Tuesday, about ten in the morning, I was inside my cell saying the Hours.[157] I heard knocking at the door and a female voice saying, 'By the prayers of our holy fathers...' I thought, 'How could there be a woman on the Mountain?' But I felt a holy sweetness inside me, and I asked, 'Who is it?'

'Euphemia,' she answered.

I thought, 'Euphemia?' Maybe a woman did something crazy and came to the Mountain dressed like a man? Now what do I do? She knocked again. I asked, 'Who is it?'

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157. The date was February 27, 1974.

'Euphemia,' she said again.

"I thought about it, but I didn't answer the door. The third time that she knocked, the door opened by itself, even though it was latched from the inside. I heard footsteps in the hallway. I rushed out of my cell, and I saw a woman with a headscarf. Someone accompanied her, who looked like the evangelist Luke, and then he disappeared. Although I was sure it wasn't from the devil since she shone brilliantly, I still asked her who she was.[158]

'The martyr Euphemia,' she answered.

'If you're the martyr Euphemia,' I said, 'then come here and we'll venerate the Holy Trinity together. Whatever I do, you do.' I went into the church, and I made a bow, saying, 'In the name of the Father.' She bowed and repeated it. 'And of the Son.'

'And of the Son,' she continued, in a quiet voice.

'Louder,' I said, 'so I can hear,' and she repeated it more loudly.

"Still in the hallway, she bowed toward my cell instead of the chapel. At first that seemed strange to me, but then I remembered that I had a small paper icon of the Holy Trinity, mounted on wood, above the door of my cell. Once we had bowed to the floor for the third time—'And of the Holy Spirit'—I said, 'Now, I should venerate you too.' I venerated her and kissed her feet and the tip of her nose: I thought it would be disrespectful to kiss her on the face.

"Afterward, the Saint sat on a small stool, and I sat on a

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158. That is to say, the elder, wise as he was, could discern that her brilliance was genuinely heavenly.—eds.

trunk, and she answered the questions I had [about the church matter].

"Then she told me about her life. I knew there was a Saint Euphemia, but I didn't know her story. When she told me about how she was tortured, I didn't just hear it—it was like I saw it, I lived it. I shuddered! 'How could you stand tortures like that?' I asked.

"'If I had known what glory the Saints have,' she replied, 'I would have done whatever I could to go through even greater torments.'[159]

"After this incident, I couldn't do anything for three days. I was walking on air, and I glorified God constantly. I couldn't eat or anything... continuous glorification."

In a letter, the Elder wrote, "In all my life, I'll never be able to repay my great debt to Saint Euphemia, who, even though I didn't know about her, and she didn't owe me anything, did me this great honor..."

Relating this incident, the Elder humbly added that Saint Euphemia appeared, "not because I'm worthy, but because at the time I was involved with an issue that had to do with the state of the Church in general, and for two other reasons."

"How someone so frail and thin," as he put it, "bore such tortures" made a great impression on the Elder. "If," he said, "she had been some kind of..."—he meant someone robust with a large frame—it would have been easier for him to understand. But actually, he told us, "she was a tiny thing."

In his paradisiacal condition, the Elder composed a troparion in honor of the Saint: "With what song of praise

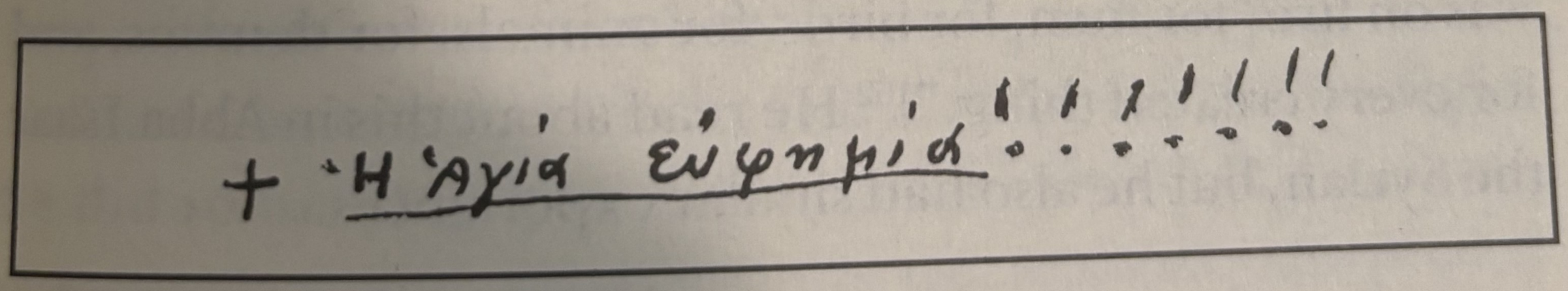
159. The Great-Martyr Euphemia is commemorated on September 16.—eds.

can we praise Euphemia, who came down from on high to visit a useless monk living in Kapsala?[160] Three times she rapped on the door. The fourth time she sought to enter, it opened by itself, miraculously. The martyr of Christ entered with heavenly glory and together they worshipped the Holy Trinity."

He also composed a hymn, which began, "Glorious great-martyr of Christ, Euphemia: after the mother of God, I love you so very much..." (Of course, these weren't for liturgical use, and the Elder didn't chant them in public.)

Departing from his normal schedule, he returned to the world again, traveling to Souroti to share this heavenly joy with the sisters. With his help and instruction, they painted an icon of the Saint as she had appeared to him. The Elder created a negative of the icon on a steel plate, which he used to make printed icons to give as a blessing to pilgrims in her honor. In creating the engraving, he encountered some difficulty in forming the fingers of her left hand. "I had some trouble making her hand," he said, "but later on I had a good thought: 'Maybe it was because I had made things difficult for her [by making her knock so much], poor woman.'"

In his Menaion, in the Synaxarion entry for February 27, he added:



That is, "† Saint Euphemia!!!!!!!"

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160. Euphemia means "praiseworthy": thus the troparion includes some word-play. See the icon of St. Euphemia on page 246. – Trans.

"Olet"

Above the hermitage, there was a ridge where the Elder used to go to pray with his prayer-rope. He made friends with a robin who would come there and named the bird Olet after a word meaning "child" in the Bedouin dialect.[161] When he would call Olet, the robin would immediately come and sit on his shoulder, and eventually it began to eat out of his hand. The Elder had a storage space where he kept a jar of rice and a jar of wheat for the bird; and, when he left, he would leave some food for Olet on a stone.

"For five years," the Elder said once, "I've been friends with Olet. Once when I was sick, he didn't eat the food that I left for him; instead, he came to see what had become of me. I was moved by the dear thing. Animals can sense a person's disposition, and that's what determines how they approach him. They regard man as their God. That's why man should love them, because they're not looking forward to another paradise."

Prayer Even for Demons

Now the Elder's heart overflowed with love for God: it was on fire "for men, for birds, for animals, for demons, and for every created thing."[162] He read about this in Abba Isaac the Syrian, but he also had similar experiences.

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161. That is, the dialect of the Bedouin whom the elder knew at Sinai. (Presumably the word is derived from the Arabic walad, which has the same meaning.)—eds.

162. *Homily* 71, p. 344

"Once," he said, "I was praying for the demons, on my knees with my head touching the ground, and I said, 'You are God, and, if it's Your will, You can find a way for even these wretched demons to be saved...'

"While I was saying these words, with pain, I saw a dog's head next to me, sticking out its tongue at me and taunting me. Maybe God allowed that in order to show me that He wants to save them, but they won't repent."[163]

Demonic Disturbances

"More than anything," the Elder taught, "the devil doesn't want us to pray. When he sees someone praying, if he can't stop him, he tries to entice his mind with fantasies and unhelpful thoughts. If that doesn't work, he'll even appear himself, just to disturb you and move you away from prayer, even just a little. For example, once I was outside, over there next to Father Tikhon's grave. I was saying the doxology with bows, and when I came to the verse, 'In thy light shall we see light,' suddenly a strong light, like a floodlight, poured from behind me and lit up the whole place. It shone all the way down to Kalliagra. I understood that it was demonic, and I didn't pay any attention to it, but continued to pray without being disturbed.

"Since he saw that I hadn't been disturbed by the light, he did something else. A few yards to my left, two little demons appeared, about five feet tall, like this, who played and hit each other with their hands and feet and laughed.

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163. See *Epistles*, pp. 90–91. (In this version of the account, however, the elder refers to himself in the third person, as "a monk.")

He's a real showman. I couldn't keep it up—I broke out laughing. See what the devil did? He didn't get my attention with the light, so he sent the little demons."

One night, while the Elder slept, he felt someone nudge him, saying, "Wake up and say your prayer rule—it's getting late."

"But," he thought in his sleep, "who is it at this hour?" He woke up and saw the devil next to him. "Oh," said the Elder, "it's you?" And, ignoring him, he turned peacefully on his other side.

The devil didn't let up. "Yes, but it's getting late—you should say your prayer rule."

"I know when to say my prayer rule," replied the Elder. "You're not going to tell me when I should pray."

Safe from Gunfire

Another time, the Elder related, "I heard gunshots in the distance, from powerful weapons. I took my prayer-rope and climbed up to a ridge for a better view, to see if a war had broken out. I leaned on a rock and said the prayer. A moment later, I saw a flash, and I ducked down right away." What had happened? A hunter had seen the Elder from a distance, mistaken him for a wild boar, and turned his gun on him. What the Elder had seen was the gun flashing in the sun, and, dropping to the ground, he had been saved. It seems that the devil, who loves wars and battles, didn't want the Elder to pray for the peace of his homeland.

On another occasion, a hunter fired on the Elder while he was praying in the forest, but again God protected him.

An Unforgettable Visit

A man from Volos gives the following testimony: "In 1974, a week before the Turks invaded Cyprus, a group of six of us went to the Holy Mountain to meet Elder Paisios. The Elder wasn't so well-known then. We followed a narrow trail that was full of underbrush and found ourselves at a hermitage. There, we saw a small Elder with a tattered cassock, digging. One of us asked, 'Where's Elder Paisios?'

'He's here,' he answered.

"He opened the door for us, and we went in and venerated the icons in the chapel. When we came out, we saw that the monk was more well-groomed. Our companion asked again, 'Where's Father Paisios?'

'You came to see a big watermelon,' he replied, 'but you found a big gourd.'

"Then we realized that we were standing before Father Paisios.

"We sat under an olive tree, some of us on rocks and some on the grass. What followed is indescribable. The conversation was a spiritual banquet. He had the most fitting, enlightening, and spiritual answers to our questions.

"After an hour of conversation, a huge snake appeared amidst the underbrush. It must have been an adder. 'Snake!' shouted someone from our group, springing up and grabbing a rock. Father Paisios reassured us, saying, 'Don't bother him: he comes and keeps me company.'

"He got up, took a small tin and filled it with water, and he put it down a short distance from us. When the snake had drunk the water, the Elder said, 'Go on now – I've got guests.' The snake immediately obeyed and went back into

the grass. We were dumbfounded. What we felt was beyond words. That incident and the conversation we had were strongly impressed on our souls.

"What was most amazing about our meeting, however, was that the Elder prophesied about the invasion of Cyprus by the Turks. We fully realized it a few days later, when we saw the events unfold just as he had foretold."

He sees a Soul

On the night of June 1, 1975, while the Elder was praying, he saw the soul of elder Philaret the Romanian, as a young child of about twelve years old with a luminous face. Surrounded by heavenly light, he ascended into heaven. The next day, he confirmed that the righteous elder Philaret—who was, true to his name, a "friend of virtue"—had passed away at that hour.[164]

Young George from the Far East

George, a young man of sixteen or seventeen, came to Mount Athos to go from one monastery to another. Though Greek by blood, he had been raised abroad from early childhood among Tibetan Buddhist monks in their monastery. He had made a great deal of progress in meditation, and he had become an accomplished sorcerer, able to summon any demon he wanted.[165] He was also an expert in the martial

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164. See *Athonite Fathers*, pp. 105–108. [The literal meaning of the name "Philaret" is "friend of virtue."—Trans.] Elder Philaret lived in the cell of Saint Andrew in Kapsala, a dependency of the monastery of Stavronikita.

165. The place of magic in Buddhism is unknown to many Westerners, who for

arts. Using the power of Satan, he made impressive displays of his abilities: he broke hazelnuts in his palm, and tossed away the shells while the nuts remained attached to his hand. He could read closed books. He struck large rocks with his bare hand, and they shattered like walnuts.

Some monks brought George to the Elder so that he could help him. George asked the Elder what powers he had, what he could do, and the Elder answered that he himself didn't have any power, and that all power is from God.

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the most part have been introduced only to a modernist Buddhism that excludes such content. A useful corrective is provided by the scholar Georges Dreyfus, the first Westerner to receive the Geshe degree of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. "Unlike modern intellectuals, Tibetan scholars are never tempted to reject magical elements and often engage in these practices, though they may view them as limited in their effects and not relevant to the soteriological goals of the tradition. In this regard they are also unlike modern Buddhists, who are profoundly uncomfortable with the magical practices that exist in Asian Buddhist traditions" (pp. 303–304). George Dreyfus, *Sounds of two hands clapping. The education of a Tibetan Monk.*

Dreyfus discusses at length the Tibetan Buddhist practice of propitiating the "mundane" "dharma protectors". "These violent spirits have taken an oath ... to protect the Buddhist teaching. Despite this commitment, they are not completely tamed and are prone to quasi-human emotions such as anger, jealousy, and so forth. Hence, they are partial and can be enlisted in morally unseemly actions such as helping practitioners to secure worldly advantages or even kill an adversary" (p. 299). In fulfillment of their oath, meanwhile, the spirits "protect the person or the group, often by violent means," from "'enemies of Buddhism' (bstan dgra)" (p. 300).

Although "many Tibetans feel the tension between the reliance on these deities and the normative ideals of the tradition," they "figure prominently in the ritual life of Tibetan monasteries.... But most of the rituals devoted to these deities are not performed in public but in the House of the Protectors (dgon khang), a separate temple devoted to them" (p. 300). Indeed, "Tibetans are often unwilling to introduce outsiders to [the practice's] secrets. Temples are always open to anybody, but the House of Protectors is often less accessible and can even at times be closed to non-Tibetans" (p. 302). – eds.

George, wanting to demonstrate his power, concentrated his gaze on a large rock in the distance, and it shattered. Then the Elder took a small rock and made the sign of the Cross over it, and told him to destroy it too. He concentrated and performed his magic, but he couldn't shatter it. Then he started trembling, and the satanic powers—which he thought he controlled—since they weren't able to break the rock, turned against him and hurled him to the opposite bank of the river. The Elder picked him up in a miserable condition.

"Another time," recounted the Elder, "while we were talking, he suddenly stood up, grabbed me by the arms and spun me around backward. 'Let's see Hadjiefendis get you loose, if he can,' he said. I felt it was like blasphemy to say that. I moved my hands a little, like this, and he was jerked away. He jumped up in the air and tried to kick me, but his foot stopped near my face, like it had hit an invisible wall! God protected me.

"At night, I kept him there, and he slept in my cell. The demons dragged him down into the pit and thrashed him for failing. In the morning he was in a bad state, injured and covered in thorns and dirt. He confessed, 'Satan beat me up because I couldn't defeat you.'"

The Elder convinced George to bring him his magical texts, and he burned them. "When he came here," the Elder recalled, "he had some sort of charm or amulet with him. I went to take it, but he wouldn't give it to me. I took a candle and said, "Lift the leg of your pants up a little." Then I put the lit candle against his leg—he yelled and jumped up. "Well," I said, "if the flame from a little candle is too much for you, how are you going to endure the fire of hell that you're

going to end up in because of what you're doing?"

The Elder kept the young man close to him for a little while and helped him, so long as he was willing to be obedient. He felt such compassion for him that he said, "I would leave the desert and go out into the world to help this boy." He made an effort to learn if he had been baptized and even found out the name of the church where his baptism had taken place. Shaken by the power and the grace of the Elder, George wanted to become a monk, but he wasn't able to.

The Elder would refer to George's case to show what a delusion it is to think that all religions are the same, that everyone believes in the same God, and that there's no difference between Tibetan Buddhist and Orthodox monks.

In Australia

In 1977, the Elder, along with Abbot Basil of Stavronikita, traveled to Australia at the invitation of the local Church, to minister to the Greek-Australians among the Orthodox.

"While we were in the airplane," he related, "I felt something inside me for a moment. I asked what country we were looking at down below. It was Syria. It has a lot of grace because of the ascetics who lived in its deserts. I felt the same way about the Holy Land.

"Later, I felt a certain chill, a demonic radiation. And I heard the loudspeaker announce that we were flying over Pakistan. In Australia, I felt that the country hadn't been sanctified yet by the blood of martyrs and holy laborers, but that it will be sanctified."

He was hosted in Melbourne by the ever-memorable Father John Limoyianni. During the day, he prepared

people for the mystery* of confession. Father John's daughter, Despina, remembers his visit: "He was a wise man who knew your problems even before you spoke to him. Wherever he was a pleasant fragrance could be sensed, including the room where he stayed. My invalid mother said to me, 'We have a Saint in our house, blessing it. When he walks, you don't hear his steps. He's an angel without wings, but with divine grace apparent on his face. From the day he arrived, I've felt completely well. Although I put clean towels out, he doesn't use them, since he has his own little towel to wash his face. In any event, there's a redolence about him.'

"He advised us to be humble, to pray, and to ask God in His goodness to provide answers for our problems, rather than to try to solve them by ourselves and thereby make them worse. My mother treasured the blanket that the Elder used as a blessed cloth providing divine protection. When she was sick, she wrapped herself up in it and abundantly felt the grace of God upon her."

Father Spiridon Vandoros, rector of the church of Saint Nectarios in Melbourne, who was the Elder's driver during the trip, recalls the following miracle: "A fellow Greek, named Dionysios... had suffered a severe stroke.[166] He was thirty, married with two children. The doctors said that he wouldn't live long, and that if he did live, he would be left in a vegetative state. We went with the Elder to the Royal Hospital of Melbourne, where he was being treated. The Elder prayed and made the sign of the Cross over his head many times with a conch containing a relic of Saint Arsenios of Cappadocia. The sick man, to the surprise of his doctors

166. "Dionysios Spiliotis of Argostoli, Kefallonia."

and relatives, returned home within a few days completely well; and he's still alive today, living in Dromana, Melbourne."

The senior archimandrite of the archdiocese at that time, Father Stephen,[167] reports: "The ever-memorable Elder's trip to Australia went unnoticed, because at the time he was not very well known. I was especially struck by the following incident. One afternoon, we visited a small church with the Elder. Leaving him inside, I went to the adjoining room to do something. After just a short while, I returned to the church, where I had left the Elder, but he wasn't there. Although I called his name, there was no answer. After calling out his name two or three more times in the silent church, I started to worry. I called out again, this time almost as loudly as I could.

"After a little while, I saw him emerge from where he had been, in the last seat in the church, as if he were returning from some other world... I concluded that, within such a short period of time, he had dedicated himself to prayer. The features of his face seemed changed. It was like he had come from an otherworldly place, one he knew well and to which he was able to be quickly transported through prayer. Naturally, neither one of us spoke about it. It was then that I realized that I was in the presence of a spiritual treasure and man of great spiritual stature. May we have his prayers. He loved us. We feel him near us. When I do my prayer rule, I say a prayer to him."

A Greek-Australian related that, as the Elder was exiting

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167. Father Stephen would later become the abbot of the Holy Monastery of Panagia Pandanassa.

the nave of a church he was visiting, a woman went to ask for his blessing. He waved her away, gesturing for her to leave. Surprised, she asked, "Me, Elder?"

"Yes."

"Why? What did I do?"

"Go and make up with your cousin first," he replied, "and then come back." And, indeed, the two had had an argument and stopped speaking to each other.

The Elder stressed the need to establish monasteries to help people spiritually, before Hindu yogis and Pentecostals succeeded in misleading them with false lights.

The mark of the Elder's visit from distant Epirus to the Greek Orthodox there was indelible. As an Australian priest said, years later, "We feel like he blessed the land as far as the eye can see. The Christians who met him honor his memory and call on his grace and his help, and they're quite right to do so."

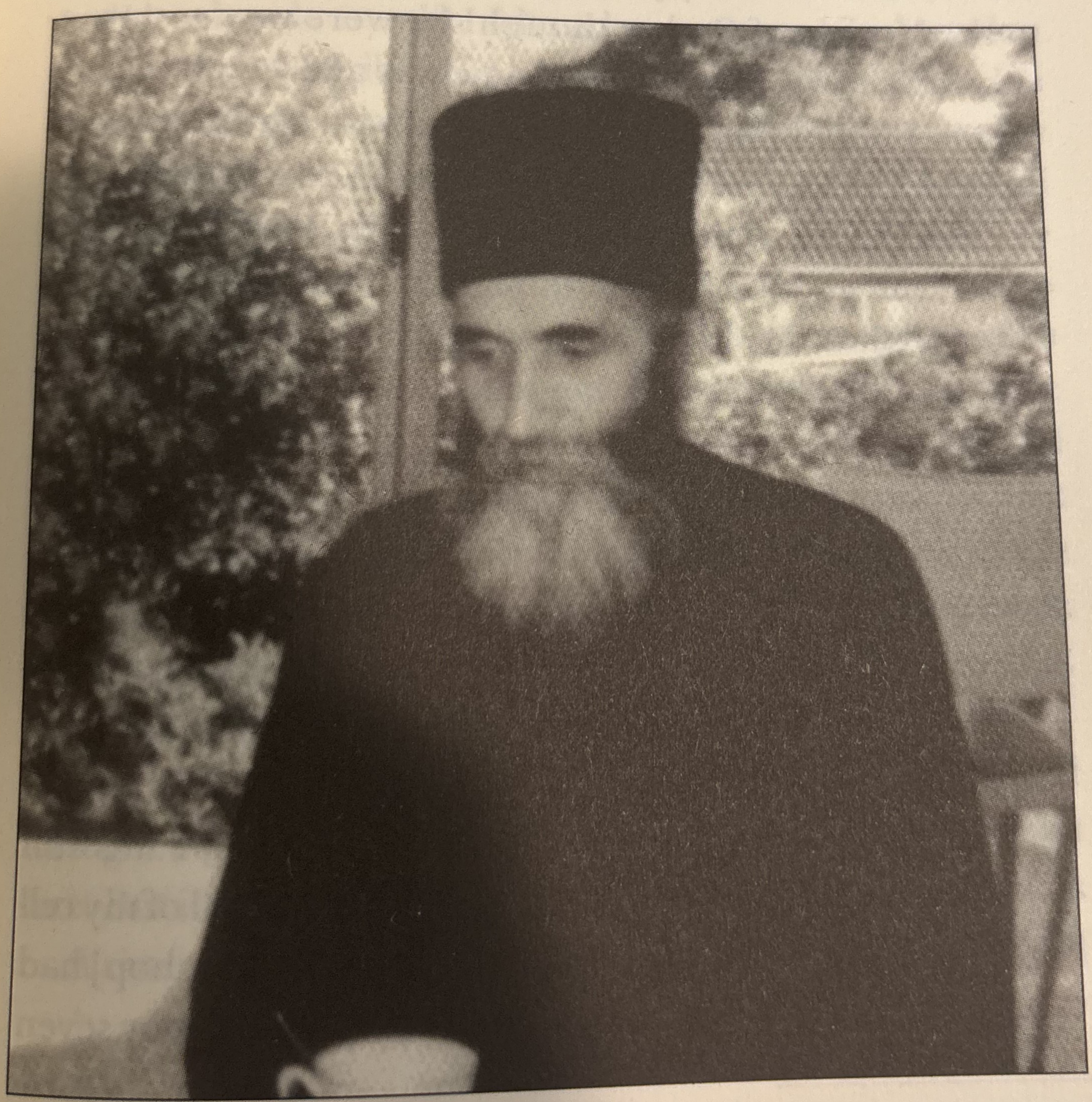
The Nighttime Visitor

The Elder once recalled an event that took place a short time after his return from Australia: "One night, I heard a knock at the door. I asked, 'Who is it?' and I heard a voice: 'So-and so' [the name of someone I knew]. He asked: 'What time is it?' and then he answered himself, 'Ah, I know. It's three.' I looked at my clock and it really was three.[168] I

168. Three o'clock according to "Athonite" or "Byzantine" time* – in other words, about nine in the evening. On the wall of his passage, the elder wrote, "3rd Hour," and next to this he drew an arrow, probably to indicate the place where the devil had stood.

opened the door, and what did I see! It was the devil, bald and really ugly. His face was red, like copper. 'I'll make you leave,' he said to me angrily, 'because you harm me.' Then he disappeared, and the place was filled with an unbearable stench."

So much did the Elder suffer over the devil's wretchedness, that for a long time afterward he would refer to the incident, sighing deeply and sadly shaking his head: "What someone turns into when he takes himself away from God!



The Elder in Australia

God's best creature—he's sunk so low! If the world knew how filthy the devil is, everyone would reject him and they wouldn't sin." The devil's face was so repugnant that the Elder used to wish aloud that, if it were possible, those who go to hell wouldn't see it.

The Appearance of Christ

The Elder related the following to a hieromonk: "I used to have some difficulty praying to Christ. I've always looked to the Mother of God as though she were my mother. I viewed Saint Euphemia in the same way and would call out to her, 'Saint Euphemia, my dear.' But with Christ, it was difficult for me. When I kissed His icon, it was with fear. And when my mind wandered away from Christ as I prayed, I didn't worry: 'Who am I,' I thought, 'to have my mind on Christ all the time?'

"And I'll tell you what happened. It was the evening of the feast of the Holy Forerunner, and the next day was the feast of Saint Carpus.[169] I felt light as a feather. I had no desire to sleep. I thought, 'Let me sit and write something down about Father Tikhon to send to the sisters.' I stayed up until 8:30 in the morning, Athos time, writing thirty pages.

"I didn't feel sleepy, but my feet felt a little tired, so I thought I would lay down. It started to get light. At nine in the morning [that is, about six, standard time], I was still awake. And, in an instant, it was as though the wall of my cell [the one next to the bed, dividing it from the workshop] had vanished. I beheld Christ, surrounded by light, six or seven

169. On May 26, 1977.

yards away. I saw Him from the side. He had fair hair and blue eyes. He didn't speak to me, but looked a little to one side, not quite at me.

"I didn't see Him with my bodily eyes. Open or closed, there's no difference. It was the eyes of the soul that beheld Him.

"When I saw Him, I thought: 'How could they spit on such a figure? How could they—those people who didn't fear God—how could they touch such a figure? How could they drive nails into this body? Unbelievable!'

"I was beside myself! I felt such a sweetness! Such exultation! I can't describe that beauty with my own words. It's what it says [in Scripture]: 'Thou art more beautiful than the sons of men.'[170] That was it. I've never seen an icon of Him like that. There was just one somewhere—I don't remember where—that looked a little like that.

"It would be worth a thousand years of struggle to see that beauty for just one moment. What great things can be granted to man, things you can't describe, and what trivial things we keep ourselves busy with!

"I believe it's a gift given to me by Father Tikhon. Don't tell this to anyone. I thought carefully about whether I should tell it even to you. I kept quiet about it until now, but, now that you're leaving, I'm telling you."[171]

In two days, they met again, and the Elder said, "I cried all night because I told you. I'm not afraid that you'll tell anyone. But it hurt me."

A sister at Souroti also felt what happened, and she wrote

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170. Ps. 44:2 (45:2).

171. This was said on May 28, 1977.

to the Elder, "On [such-and-such a date], at [such-and-such an hour]... The rest you'll tell us yourself." And, in fact, when he next travelled, he told them about it all. He described what he had seen, and they made an icon of Christ just as he had seen Him. See the icon on page 344.

Roads and Cars

In 1977, the question of whether cars[172] should be permitted on Mount Athos was being debated among the monks there. Disagreement ruled the day. Some supported the use of cars on the Holy Mountain with the justification that they would be useful and would save time that could then be used for prayer. Others opposed cars and road-construction, believing they would cause Mount Athos to lose its stillness and change its spiritual character.

The Elder agreed with the latter group. He openly took a position on the matter, speaking with boldness and clarity. "If they want conveniences like that," he said, "let them go to some monastery in the world instead of destroying Mount Athos. It's a lesser evil for them to lose their purity than to destroy this pure place. They even want to build a road on the ridge that would go across the whole mountain. Listen to that! Don't they understand? You could say it's like hacking away at the Mountain's backbone with an axe. If things go on like this, then what? Lots of people in cars will wander over all of Mount Athos as tourists, and some of them will even sell refreshments. And Mount Athos, which the holy fathers sanctified with their

172. The entrance of private cars on Mount Athos is still limited. – eds.

struggles, will become a real madhouse..."

And, after a little silence, he added, "But the Mother of God won't let her garden be destroyed..."

Many monastery representatives visited his hermitage to consult with him. The Elder, in addition to offering his intense and heartfelt personal exhortations, drew up a statement opposing roads and cars on the Holy Mountain. He signed it along with other respected and distinguished Athonites. Finally, the Holy Community decided that each monastery would have authority over the use of cars within its boundaries. But, unfortunately, the situation didn't change—it only got worse. In the end, when people still wouldn't listen to him, the Elder said with sorrow, "The people responsible for this will answer to God. It's enough not to agree with them and not to be the source of the problem."

During this period, he returned from a trip to the world in wintertime. Because there was so much snow, the bus didn't come to meet the boat in Daphne as usual. Instead, a car belonging to a monastery picked up the travelers, most of whom were monks. They all got in and tried to convince the Elder to get in too, but in vain. He started out on foot, alone, followed by a single young man. He was carrying a fairly heavy pack over his shoulder, and he was exhausted and cold, and it kept snowing. He didn't manage to get to his cell that day—late that evening he arrived in Karyes, where he spent the night. He went through all this hardship so that his actions wouldn't contradict what he had said.

He maintained his views until the end of his life. It's worth noting that the day before he left the Holy Mountain forever, on October 21, 1993, he attended the feast-day of the cell of Saint Christodoulos, along with some other fathers he knew.

Afterward, when the opportunity arose, he directed the conversation toward the topic of roads and cars on the ascetic Holy Mountain of Athos. He inveighed against them with unusual sharpness, as if he wanted to deliver his final counsel with special intensity and to put a seal on his opinion.

Foresight

Apostolos, a theologian and chanter,[173] recounts his experiences with the Elder: "I visited the Elder for the first time on September 12, 1977 at the Hermitage of the Holy Cross. As soon as he saw me—without knowing me, of course—he said to me, 'Welcome, Apostolos.'

"In January, 1979, I visited him again. Around that time my cousin had gotten engaged to a young man, and I asked the Elder if he would make a good family man.

"The Elder replied, 'This guy's not going to do well. He wronged a girl—he promised to marry a young girl, but then he left her, and she was so upset that she tried to kill herself. She survived, but now she's paralyzed. If he doesn't ask her for forgiveness for what he did, he'll never get anywhere.'

"And in fact, till this day, in spite of all his efforts, he hasn't managed to start a family and succeed in life."

A Radiant Icon

It was the evening of October 19, 1978, the eve of the feast of Saint Artemios. The Elder was on his knees at prayer. Above his pillow was a paper icon in a plastic sleeve, a copy of

173. Apostolos Papachristos of Agrinion.

the icon of Christ as He had appeared to the Elder. As he prayed, he saw a light above his pillow passing from one end of the room to the other like a roving flashlight. He could see that it was radiating from the icon. Full of heavenly exultation, he kissed it for some time, touching it reverently, and again it gave off light. This miraculous phenomenon continued for several days: an Athonite monk who venerated the icon eight days later also witnessed this supranatural light. In the end, the Elder gave the radiant icon to someone for spiritual consolation.

A Saint "Treated Unjustly"

One day, sitting at the bench outside of Stavronikita, the Elder was visiting with pilgrims, among whom was a high school teacher of theology. The theology teacher, repeating a popular Western error, claimed that Abba Isaac the Syrian was a Nestorian. Father Paisios tried to persuade him that Abba Isaac was not only Orthodox but also a Saint, and that his *Ascetical Homilies* possess great grace and strength. But the Elder's words were in vain: the theology teacher stubbornly insisted on his views. The Elder left for his hermitage, praying and so sad that he was in tears.

When he had come to a spot on the path near a large plane tree, something happened to him. These words, "something happened," were the only description he gave us of the incident, not wanting to reveal the exact details. According to one testimony, he saw in a vision the choir of the holy fathers passing before him, and one of them, stopping, said to him, "I am Isaac the Syrian. I am completely Orthodox. The Nestorian heresy was indeed present in my region,

but I fought against it." We are not in a position to endorse or to reject the reliability of this witness. We know for certain only that the Elder experienced a supranatural occurrence that confirmed with perfect clarity the holiness and total Orthodoxy of Abba Isaac.

The Elder had the Saint's *Ascetical Homilies* by his pillow, and he studied them constantly. For one six-year period, it was his only spiritual reading. He would take one line and call it to mind frequently throughout the day, studying it in a deep and practical way – "like animals chew over their food," as he put it. As a blessing, he distributed a selection of the homilies in order to encourage their study. "Studying the *Ascetical Homilies* of Abba Isaac the Syrian," he once wrote, "will help you a lot, because it helps us understand the deeper meaning of life. Whatever kind of complex a believer might have, big or small, the *Homilies* help him get rid of it. There are a lot of vitamins in Abba Isaac, so a little study transforms the soul."[174]

He recommended that laymen also read the *Homilies*, but bit by bit, in order to digest the text.

He would say that the *Homilies* were as valuable as a complete patristic library. The entire text, he thought, deserved to be underlined: in his copy, under a picture of the Saint writing with a quill pen, he wrote, "My Abba, give me your pen to underline your whole book."

The Elder didn't just study Abba Isaac, he also specially honored him among the saints. At the hermitage in Panagouda, where he would later take up residence, one of the five or six icons above the small altar-table in the chapel

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174. *Epistles*, p. 76. [The translation has been revised for clarity. – eds.]

was of Saint Isaac. Out of love and respect for him, he once gave his name to a monk taking the Great Schema. He instituted a celebration of the Saint's memory on September 28, holding an all-night vigil in common with the other fathers. One year at this vigil, the Elder was seen in the light of Tabor, transformed and floating in the air.[175]

Previously, when he still celebrated Saint Isaac on January 28, along with Saint Ephraim the Syrian the Elder added the following to the *Menaion* entry for this day:

Τῇ ΚΗ΄ τοῦ αὐτοῦ μηνός, Μνήμη τοῦ Ὁσίου Πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἐφραίμ, τοῦ Σύρου. καὶ Ἰσαάκ τοῦ μεγάλου Ἡσυχαστοῦ καὶ ἀδικουμένου.

That is, "On the 28th of this month, the memory of our Holy Father Ephraim the Syrian and Isaac, the great hesychast, treated unjustly."

A Crowd of Demons

"I was sitting in my cell," writes the Elder, "when I heard the bell ring. I looked out the window, and what did I see! A man who taught black magic accompanied by a crowd of demons. Amazing! It's one thing for a person, an image of God, to have one demon, but to have a whole army of them?

175. See p. 279, "Transfiguration".

I didn't open the door. Why would I? To waste my time?"[176]

When the Elder went down to the monastery later, the monks told him about a strange visitor who had come by, but the Elder didn't say anything.

A Snake Confirms the Elder's Words

Once, some spiritual fathers from the world visited the Elder and asked him about how to pastor people who came for confession. They wanted to enforce the letter of the law indiscriminately, following the canons word-for-word, not taking into consideration the degree of repentance of the people coming to them. The Elder taught that we must approach people with love and lenience, but they held to their position.

Then he said that we should surround even snakes with love—so of course we should do the same for man. And, at that moment, a large snake drew close to him and stood up straight, as though it wanted to confirm the Elder's words. Of course, the spiritual fathers were amazed, and persuaded, by this unusual show of support for the Elder's position.

He Prayed and the Heavens Gave Rain

A young Athonite monk once visited the Elder. They talked, and when he left the Elder said, "Tonight let's pray for rain, because this drought is causing a lot of damage in the world and destroying the crops." But the monk didn't pray, either because he didn't take the Elder's comment

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176. That is to say, because the man was accompanied by so many demons, the elder realized that he had not come to be benefited.—eds.

seriously, or because he forgot or simply neglected it. But at night he saw it raining, even though the weather had been fair; and he marveled at the boldness of the Elder and the grace that God gave him—to open the heavens with his prayer like the prophet Elijah and bring forth rain.

"It's a good thing I didn't pray," the monk remarked later. "Maybe I would have thought that it rained because God heard me."

Guardian Angel

"It was the feast of Saint Isidore of Pelusium," said the Elder.[177] "I had a lot of concerns at the time, and because of that I had bad headaches. My blood pressure was high—it made my eye hurt, and I was in danger of having a stroke. I felt like someone had hit the inside of my head with a hammer, trying to break out. At about nine in the evening,[178] while I was lying in bed, I saw a very beautiful angel appear as if it had emerged from inside me. It was in the form of a small twelve-year-old child, and its hair was very fair and fell to its shoulders. It smiled at me and gently passed its hand over my eyes. Immediately, all my concerns went away and the pain stopped. I felt so much sweetness that I wanted the pain to come back, so I could see my guardian angel again."

A Different Kind of Feast

Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol, in Cyprus, recalls

177. The event the elder recounts took place on February 4, 1979.

178. In standard time, not Byzantine time.

one of his encounters with the Elder: "I went to visit the Elder in September of 1977. It was a Monday, the eve of the Feast of the Holy Cross. I knocked on the door early in the morning, and he opened up for me. He was joyful and good-humored. 'Oh, deacon, it's a good thing you came,' he said to me. 'I'm having a feast tomorrow. Chanters are coming, and I ordered some excellent fish, but we didn't have a deacon.[179] Now that you're here, we're all set.' He joked around like that some more, and then he told me, 'You'll stay here tonight.'

"I knew that the Elder never kept people there with him overnight, so I jumped for joy.

"We went to the chapel and he sent me into the Holy Altar. I put it in order—dusted, swept, and did different chores. I felt an immense joy within me. At midday, we ate. He made tea, got a rusk of bread, and brought in some wild vegetables from his garden.

"The way the Elder said the mealtime prayer made a great impression on me. Lifting his hands, the Elder said the Lord's Prayer with the ardent desire and reverence of a man who knew that he was literally speaking with God.

"Afterward he took me to the cell, and I rested for about an hour. Then, we did small vespers using the prayer-rope.

"When we finished, the Elder told me, 'Look, deacon. Now we're going to keep vigil with the prayer-rope and tomorrow a priest will come and serve Liturgy for us. Do you know how to use a prayer-rope? I'll tell you what to do.' And he gave me a rule of prayer. It was a wise one, which would

179. Specifically, the elder jokes that he ordered rofos, a kind of grouper that is often called the best-tasting fish in the Mediterranean.—eds.

keep me from getting drowsy during the night. He told me to do a single three-hundred-knot prayer-rope, saying, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.' Next, I was to do a one-hundred-knot prayer-rope, praying to the Panagia; a three-hundred-knot prayer-rope in prayer to Christ for the living; and a one-hundred-knot prayer-rope for the living to the Panagia. After that, I was to pray to Christ for the reposed using a three-hundred-knot prayer-rope; then do a one-hundred-knot prayer-rope to the Panagia for the reposed; followed by a three-hundred-knot prayer-rope to the Holy Cross, and finally another three-hundred-knot prayer-rope, repeating 'Glory to Thee, our God, Glory to Thee.' It was the first time I had ever heard of such a thing. 'Using a prayer-rope like this,' he explained to me, 'is a doxology. When you finish, start over again from the beginning.'

"'If you hear a noise,' he said, 'don't be startled. There are wild boars, jackals, and other things around here.' He put me in his small guest-house and told me that around midnight he would call me so we could go to the church to read the communion prayers.

"From time to time I would hear the Elder sigh heavily. And he would occasionally knock on the wall and ask, 'Hey, deacon, are you sleeping? Are you all right?'

"A little before one o'clock—just past midnight—we went to the chapel. He had me sit in the only stall there, and he gave me a candle so I could read the prayers before Holy Communion. He stood on my left, reading the verse 'Glory to Thee, O our God, Glory to Thee' when it was called for. Each time, he would cross himself and bow to the ground.

"After I read the troparion that begins 'O Mary, Thou Mother of God' and the Elder read the verse, 'Most Holy

Mother of God, save us' – I remember that we didn't get farther than that – I felt something. I don't know what it was – I can't describe it. I stopped reading, and just then the oil lamp in front of the Panagia started to swing, not vigorously, but steadily. Each time it swung over the full width of the icon, and the whole chapel was flooded with light. I could see without the candle, and I even thought of putting it out.

"I turned toward the Elder and saw him with his hands crossed over his chest, bowing deeply. He realized that I wanted to ask him something, and he motioned for me not to speak. I stayed there in the stall while the Elder bowed next to me. I felt so much love and reverence for the Elder, and it seemed as though I were in paradise.

"We stayed like this for half-hour or an hour – I couldn't tell exactly. I didn't know what to do. Without thinking about it, I continued to read the Communion prayers by myself. And when I came to the prayer beginning 'From defiled lips and an unclean heart,' the light slowly started to disappear, and then the oil lamp stopped swinging. We finished the Communion prayers and went out into the hall. He gave me a stool to sit on, and he sat silently on a small chest.

"After a little while, I asked him, 'Elder, what was that?'

'What was what?' he replied.

'The oil lamp. How did it swing like that for so long?'

'What did you see?' he asked.

'The Panagia's oil lamp was swinging back and forth.'

'That's all you saw?'

'And light,' I added.

'Anything else?' the Elder asked once again.

'No, I didn't see anything else.' Clearly, he had seen something more.

'Anyway, it was nothing,' the Elder finally answered.

I insisted. 'Elder, what do you mean it was nothing? The oil lamp was moving, and there was a light!'

'Well, haven't you read what the books say, how the Panagia goes around to all the monks' cells to see how they're doing? Well, she came by here too and saw a couple of kooks, and she thought she would make us happy by moving her oil lamp.'

"Later, on his own accord, he started telling me about different experiences he had had. He told me how he had seen Saint Euphemia, and much more. His whole mood had changed. He spoke to me about spiritual matters until the morning. He stressed to me, 'I'm telling you about all this out of love, deacon, to help you; not so you'll think I'm someone.'

"At five-thirty that morning the priest came, and the elder wanted me to concelebrate, but I didn't have deacon's vestments. He brought me an old sticharion* and a priest's epitrachelion* that he turned into an orarion* and fastened with a safety pin, and he found something to serve as cuffs, which he wrapped around my wrists. I looked like a clown, but it was the most beautiful liturgy of my life. It was only the three of us.

"He kept me with him through Saturday. Once he sent me to Bourazeri to see some fellow Cypriots, and to stay for lunch so I could eat. And another time he sent me to Stavronikita, again to eat, because there were just tea and bread-rusks at his cell."

A Different Kind of Answer

"I heard about Father Paisios from a student," recalls a grocer named Theodore,[180] "and I visited him at his cell. As I was leaving, I mentioned a problem I had at my store: 'Elder, I have a lot of mice. I can't seem to do anything about it, and I'm really worried. Please, pray to God that they'll leave.' I begged him with pain of soul, because they were running all over the place in the store. They had ruined a lot of food and you could constantly hear them in the ceiling. They would even spring up in front of customers during the day. I had gotten a big radio from Germany, and the mice had gotten inside, made a nest, bred, eaten the coils, and destroyed it.

"He answered me, 'Theodore – we're going to bother God about mice?' He didn't seem to take it seriously.

"I went back home feeling spiritually elated, but at the same time tempted to feel hurt, because the Elder didn't seem to understand the problem that I had told him about."

"Nevertheless, when I returned to my store, I was aware that something had changed. Two days passed before I realized that the mice had disappeared – there wasn't a single one left. The Elder's prayer had chased them off.

"Some time later, I began to lose a lot of weight, feel exhausted and without strength. I went in for some exams. Three doctors decided I needed to be treated for a viral infection.

"Being bedridden and unable to work, I decided to write Elder Paisios about my condition. I asked him to write me to tell me if I should leave Xanthi for treatment, or trust in

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180. Theodore Hadjipateras of Xanthi

the providence of God and the local doctors.

"On the second day of treatment, I felt an intense pain in my stomach. 'You're going to end up with intestinal bleeding,' the doctor said. 'You need to stop your medication.' And so I entered a clinic. At midnight that night, I got up and fainted, dropping to the floor. I had totally lost my appetite—I was melting away like a candle. The doctors would look at me and not say anything. When I came to, it was Thursday afternoon. My condition grew worse through Saturday evening.

"On Sunday morning I woke up and felt an indescribable strength in body and soul. I got up from bed and telephoned my wife to come with a doctor who was a friend of ours, so they could take me home from the clinic instead of my sneaking off like some thief.

"'Yesterday,' the doctor told me, 'you were in awful shape, but something's definitely changed. I don't get it—I can't explain it at all.' I told him, 'A miracle's happened. God worked one of His miracles.' I kept asking myself who had interceded for me, for this miracle to take place. With a restored appetite, I simultaneously ate and wept, for I was indescribably moved. The next day I went to work without feeling the slightest fatigue. In a few days, I gained back the weight I had lost.

"In early December, I visited Elder Paisios on the Holy Mountain with a professor who was a friend of mine, and a student. The Elder opened the gate for us, and the professor entered, followed by the student, and they went down to his cell. The Elder and I stayed back.

"'How are you, Theodore?' he asked me, 'Are you well now?' I supposed he was asking because he saw that I was

healthy after I had written him about my illness. 'Yes, Elder—glory to God, I'm very well,' I answered him. As we started going toward the cell, he said, 'You got my letter, right?' I paused, thinking to myself that I hadn't received any letters from him. But, before I could answer, he said, 'I didn't write you a letter, but I answered you in my own way.' I felt an earthquake inside me, and I realized that the Elder had made me well by his prayers. 'You got my letter, right?' he asked again. 'Yes, Elder,' I answered, 'I got it.' I was greatly moved. After I venerated the icons in the chapel, I went outside and wept profusely."

Divine Liturgy at the Hermitage of the Holy Cross

On October 27, 1978, two Athonite fathers visited the Elder at his hermitage. One of them describes their visit as follows: "We arrived an hour or two before dark, and we stood outside the chain-link fence at the door of his garden, without ringing the bell. We could see smoke rising in front of his cell and heard a somewhat animated conversation from within. A little later, we saw the Elder's face pop out from behind a pile of wood. He looked at us, and we greeted him with a bow. Waving at us cheerfully, he made his way over to us and opened the door, prostrating before us and trying to kiss our hands.

"As we walked down to the cell, we saw a young monk from Stavronikita monastery cooking on a fire that was blinding him with smoke. The Elder introduced us, laughing: 'Father Simon is the chef for the feast.'[181] To him he said,

181. His name has been changed.

'Watch it, buddy—don't go burning the food on me.' The monk laughed, and we realized that they had been joking with each other.

"After we venerated in the chapel, he led us to the guest-house and offered us a snack. He explained that the following day was the anniversary of the repose of Father Arsenios of Cappadocia, and that they would have Divine Liturgy, which is why they were in such good spirits.

"After a a minute or two of silence, he told us, 'Whenever visitors in cassocks would come, Father Tikhon used to ask them if they were priests and if they served liturgy. If they answered 'yes,' he glorified God. But if a priest said that he didn't serve liturgy, then you can't imagine how much it would upset him.'

"This put us both at a loss: in fact, my friend was a hieromonk, and he hadn't celebrated liturgy for some time, even though there was no reason why he shouldn't.[182] We looked at each other...

"We talked for a while about spiritual matters, and he suggested that we stay the night in his cell. Later, the disciple brought the food he had made, and we ate it while they ate some nuts. Father Paisios crushed a few almonds in a small mortar and only ate two or three spoonfuls of that.

"In the morning, the priest came from the monastery and concelebrated with my friend, the hieromonk. I chanted the liturgy with Father Paisios, who chanted with evident exultation.

"Before the Divine Liturgy started, he approached me and whispered in my ear that he would have me serve

182. That is to say, there was no canonical impediment to his serving.—eds.

Liturgy some other time. He continued, so I would understand why he had chosen to have my friend serve rather than me, even though I was older and had been ordained longer. 'I realized,' he said, 'that he hadn't celebrated liturgy for a while. That's why I told you yesterday what Father Tikhon would say to priests.'

"After the Divine Liturgy, the priest and the disciple left for the monastery, but the Elder kept us there for a few hours. When we stood up to leave, we felt nature taking on a different appearance around us. We sensed everything spiritually. It seemed like even the plants might speak to us..."

God has to Help

"Once, I found myself in a predicament," relates a pilgrim,[183] "because of all the obligations I had, and I went to see the Elder for some support. After traveling through snow and terrible weather, I arrived and knocked on his door. The Elder opened the door and took me inside immediately. 'I've been waiting for you,' he said. Of course, I hadn't let him know that I would be coming. He had me sit near the wood stove and patiently started making me some tea. He put water in the pot and made the sign of the Cross, saying 'Glory to Thee O God!' He put some tea in the pot, crossed himself again and again said 'Glory to Thee O God!' Then he put the pot on the fire and crossed himself again, once more saying 'Glory to Thee O God!'

"He still hadn't said one word to me beyond 'I've been waiting for you.' I was watching him, and his calmness start-

183. Eleutherios Tamiolakis of Crete*.

ed to get on my nerves, because my problems were really troubling me. When the tea was ready, he gave me the cup, looked at me with that innocent and compassionate look, and calmly asked me what was the matter and why I seemed anxious. Irritated, I began to blurt out all my problems, emphasizing how difficult things are out in the world . He grinned, took a sip of his tea, and said to me, calmly, 'Well, and what are you worried about? God will help.' I became even more annoyed, and with the boldness I had with him – because I loved him so much – I said, 'Well, that's fine, Elder. God helps once, He helps twice – does He always have to help?'

"Then he looked at me seriously, and he said something to me that literally struck me like lightning: 'Yes. He has to.' His certainty was so great, and it was so clear that he knew this first-hand, that suddenly everything changed. My irritation went away, I calmed down, and I felt deeply at peace.

"I had only one more question to ask him: 'All right. And why does God have to help us?' And he gave me an answer that could only be given by someone who truly feels like a child of God with boldness before his father. 'Just like you have children, and you feel you have to help them, leaving Thessaloniki and coming here in weather like this because you're worried – God, Who made us and has us as His children, is concerned about us and feels a need to help us. Yes – He has to!'

"His answer was so direct that every weight suddenly lifted from me, and after that I stopped worrying about the future for good."

Cheerful and Witty

One of the Elder's qualities that has not been sufficiently emphasized is that he was always genial and joyful. Joyfulness is a virtue, and spontaneous laughter is blameless.

The Elder often provoked spontaneous laughter with funny stories in order to console afflicted souls—but this was also simply a character trait of his. Many times, underneath a simple joke was hid deep spiritual meaning. In particular, he would make puns, invent etymologies, and connect words in amazing ways.[184] However, in all his joking, he was so gentle that no one would ever feel hurt or condemed. What follows are but a few examples from among many.[185]

Someone with an interest in antiquity visited the Elder, asking to see the ancient artifacts in his cell. The Elder had fun with the pretentiousness of his requests. "These ruins," he said to him with tongue in cheek, as he showed the man a dilapidated wall, "are from the time of Nebuchadnezzar."

The Elder, as is typical on the Holy Mountain, greeted guests with water and lumps of delight. "Elder," a small child once asked him, "where do you find so much lumps of delight?"

He pointed to the strawberry trees. "Here—I take them from these lumps of delight trees."

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184. Unfortunately, humor that is a product of language and culture does not translate well into another linguistic setting.

185. To be precise, we should note that not all of the following incidents took place at the Hermitage of the Holy Cross.

"Father, what do you do here?" a thoughtless person once asked him.

"I keep the ants from bickering," he replied. Another time, he was asked in a similar way about how he spent his nights. He pointed to the stars. "See these oil lamps in the sky?" he asked. "My obedience is to light them at night."[186]

"Father," someone asked him, "how can I obtain watchfulness?"

"Watchfulness? You've got to wash every day. I've been washing, but so far I haven't gotten anywhere."[187]

One time his friend Katie Patera went to Souroti to see the Elder with a man named George Hare, a professor of Medicine at the University of Ioannina. "You came with a Hare this time," the Elder told her. "Next time you'll come with a tortoise." And indeed, on her next visit she and a female acquaintance got lost, and it took them from nine to ten hours to reach the monastery instead of the usual five.[188]

The Elder once tried to kiss the hand of a newly ordained priest, but out of humility, the man wouldn't let him take it. "If you wanted to have your own hand," the Elder told him,

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186. "My obedience" – that is to say, his practical responsibility as a monastic. – Trans.

187. The English happily mirrors the Greek: the elder's play on words uses nipsis (watchfulness) and nivomai (to bathe or wash). – Trans.

188. The man's name, in fact, was "George Lagos" – the word lagos meaning "hare" in Greek. – Trans.

"then you shouldn't have become a priest." And he took his hand and kissed it.

One day at Panagouda, the Elder was planting onion bulbs that he had stored inside a box for squid. A "know-it-all" sort of person came up to him with his hands behind his back, and asked the Elder what he was doing.

"I'm planting squid," replied the Elder with a straight face.

"Do they take root?" enquired the man.

"Of course, if you plant them with their whiskers down."

"We can't limp along in the spiritual life; we can't just stay in the hallway. If you stay in the hallway, you'll never get to God's living room" – that is, paradise.[189]

Just before the start of the Triodion – that is, the lenten period preceding Pascha – he asked a pilgrim, "Have you ever gone through a diodion?" ("Diodion" is the Greek word for tollbooth.) "When you do, you have to pay. Now, when we go through the Triodion, do we pay?" That is, do we make sacrifices?

When the Elder was at the Iveron skete, a young acquaintance of his came to visit him wearing a suit and a fine tie. The Elder, who took pleasure in simple things, found an original and funny way to teach him simplicity in a few words. "Will you give me your tie," he asked him jok-

189. The elder uses similar-sounding words in Greek: khōlainō (to limp) and khōl (hallway). – Trans.

ingly, "so we can put it on this little donkey here, so he can be happy too for a little while?" The man handed the tie to the Elder, who put it around the donkey's neck. The donkey looked so funny that the Elder couldn't hold back his laughter. The young man got the message and the next time he came back to the Holy Mountain, he wasn't wearing a tie.

Other times the Elder played the fool. Once, a person who wasn't interested in spiritual matters at all came to visit him, and just wanted to pass the time and tell him about the latest news. The Elder figured him out. "So what's new?" the penniless ascetic asked his visitor. "How much is the pound going for?"

He had notified the monastery not to let anyone bother him for a few days, when a group of students passed by his cell. They rang insistently, but the Elder didn't come. So they climbed under the wire fence, and the Elder had to open up and ask them what they wanted.

"Elder," they told him, "we want to talk about spiritual things."

"Guys, what spiritual things are we going to talk about? What we need are the police. What does Christ say in the Gospel? 'He that entereth not by the door, but climbeth up some other way...'" He didn't need to add the rest of the quote: "the same is a thief and a robber."[190]

[The word "archimandrite" means, literally "chief of the fold." And the word for "a fold" in Greek can also mean "an

190. John 10:1.

enclosed area." So,] when some archimandrite forced open the fence around the hermitage—though the Elder was polite and didn't say anything then—later, he joked, "Well, it's blessed. After all, he's an 'archimandrite.'"

One Greek pilgrim asked the Elder to also say something to his English friends that were with him. The Elder, without knowing English of course, found an amusing way to puzzle the egotistical confidence of the Europeans and replied, "Tell them that we Greeks sometimes write the word 'I' with small letters, but they always use a capital I!"

Using humor to criticize the use of impure wax for candles, the Elder would say that there's a lot of money in oil—and a lot of money in oil candles, too.[191]

Consoling an afflicted soul, he would say, "Tomorrow, don't sorrow."[192]

A demoniac said to him, "I am the I Am. Fall down and worship me." The Elder, addressing the demon who was actually speaking, replied, "You're a donkey, man—a donkey."[193]

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191. More literally, "You make a lot [para afinei] from paraffin [parafinē]." Paraffin wax is an inexpensive synthetic wax derived from petroleum, often employed in parishes as a substitute for beeswax.—Trans.

192. Literally, "Don't be sad from now on." In Greek also, the words rhyme.—Trans.

193. The words I Am [o On] and donkey [onos] that were spoken by the demon and the elder are phonetically similar in Greek.—Trans.

A monk asked him if it is permitted for them to eat soy, and he replied, "We have a lot of soy, but we are not closely related to the holy fathers."[194]

"Elder, you're an ascetic," one Athonite told him. The Elder asked him with displeasure, "What does it mean to be an ascetic?" He continued, "To be an ascetic means to be without a roof, but I have a hut. Therefore I am neither an ascetic, nor without a roof."[195]

Someone, seeing the Elder walking barefoot, asked him why he didn't wear shoes. He answered: "The shoes my mother gave me are the best—the older they get, the more rugged they get."[196]

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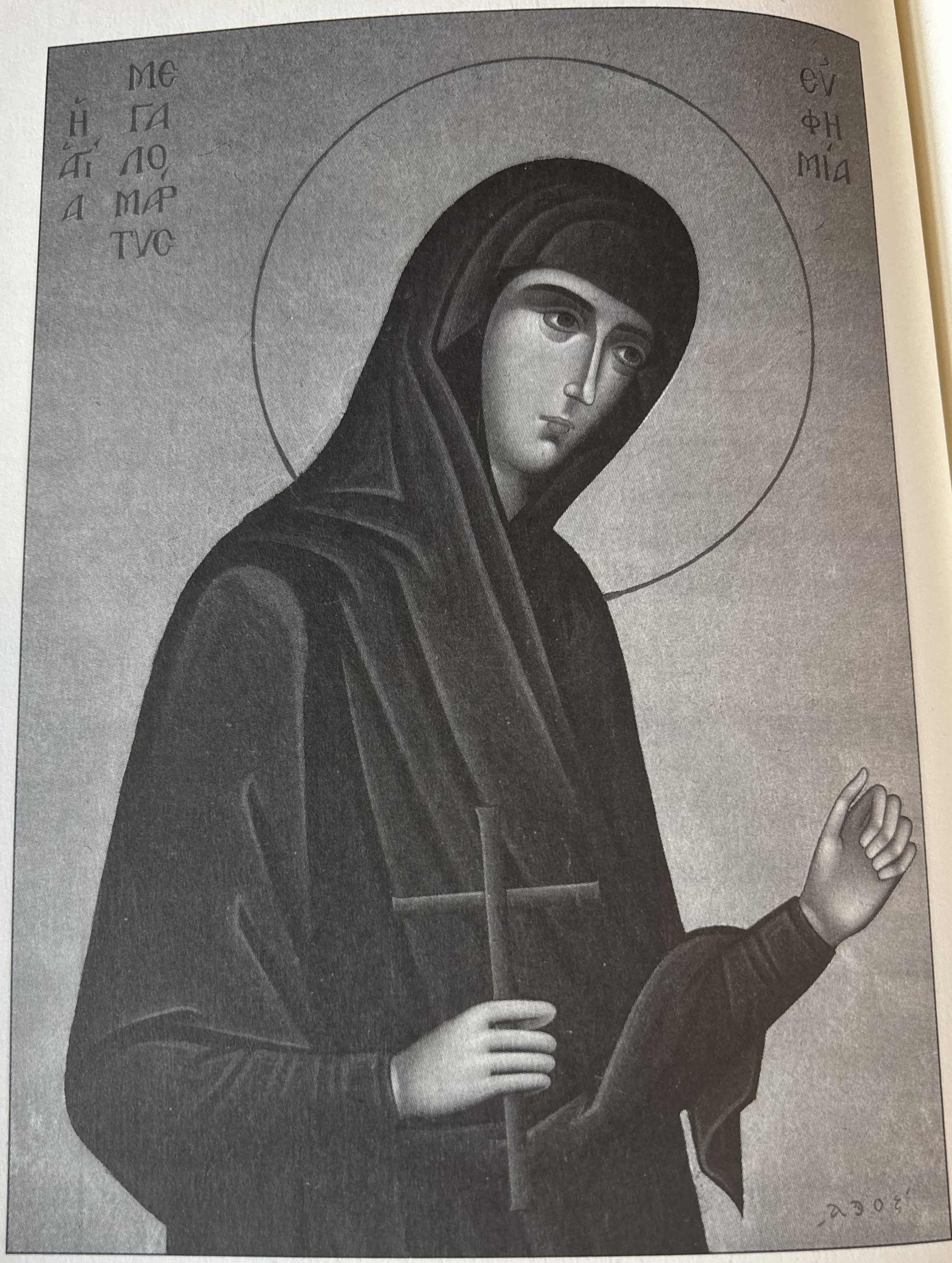
194. The words for soy (soia) and relation (soi) are phonetically similar in Greek.—Trans.

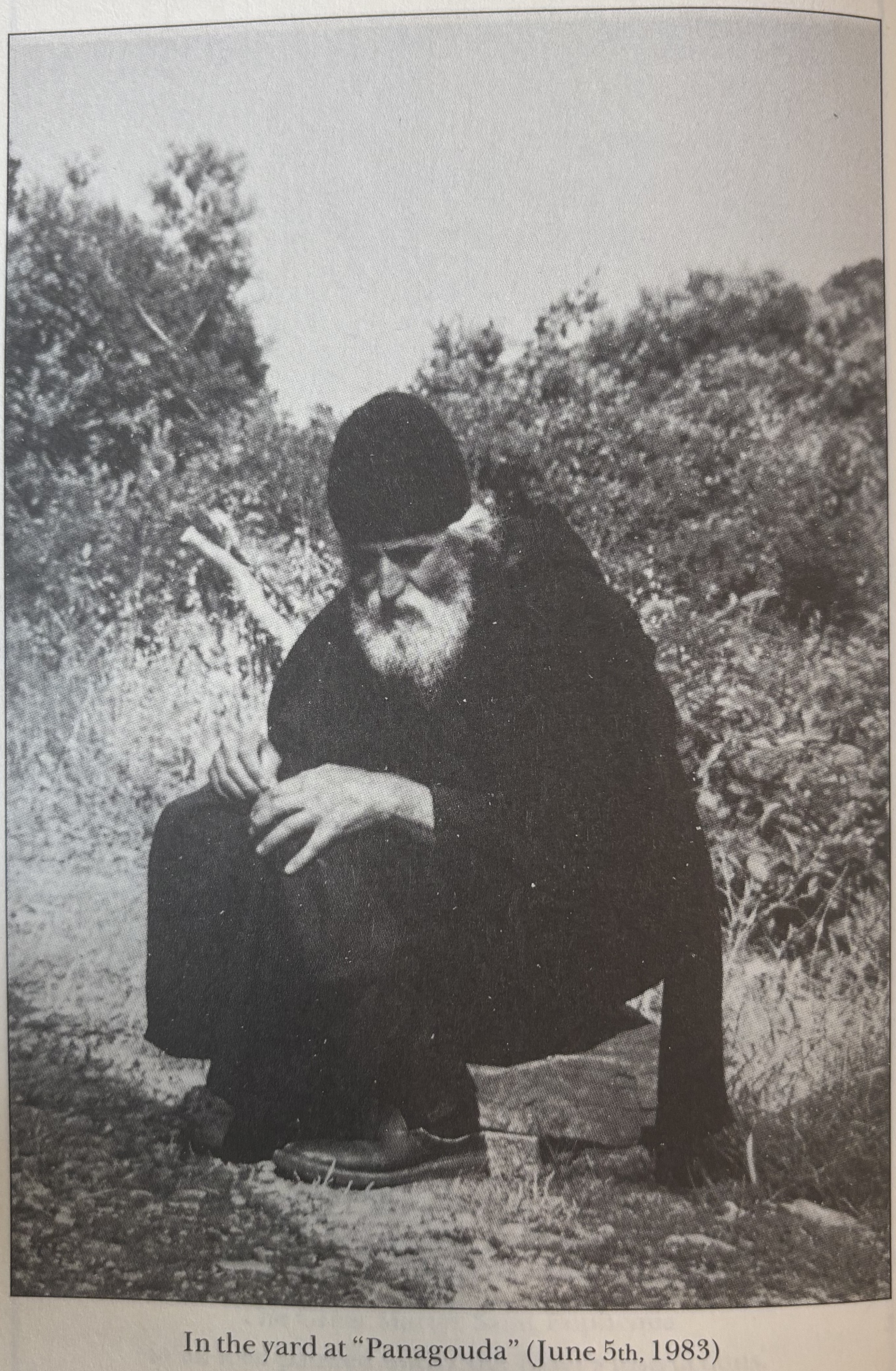
195. The word translated "without a roof" (askepēs) and the word for ascetic (askētēs) are phonetically similar in Greek.—Trans.

196. In other words, the soles of the feet toughen and become accustomed to the ground.

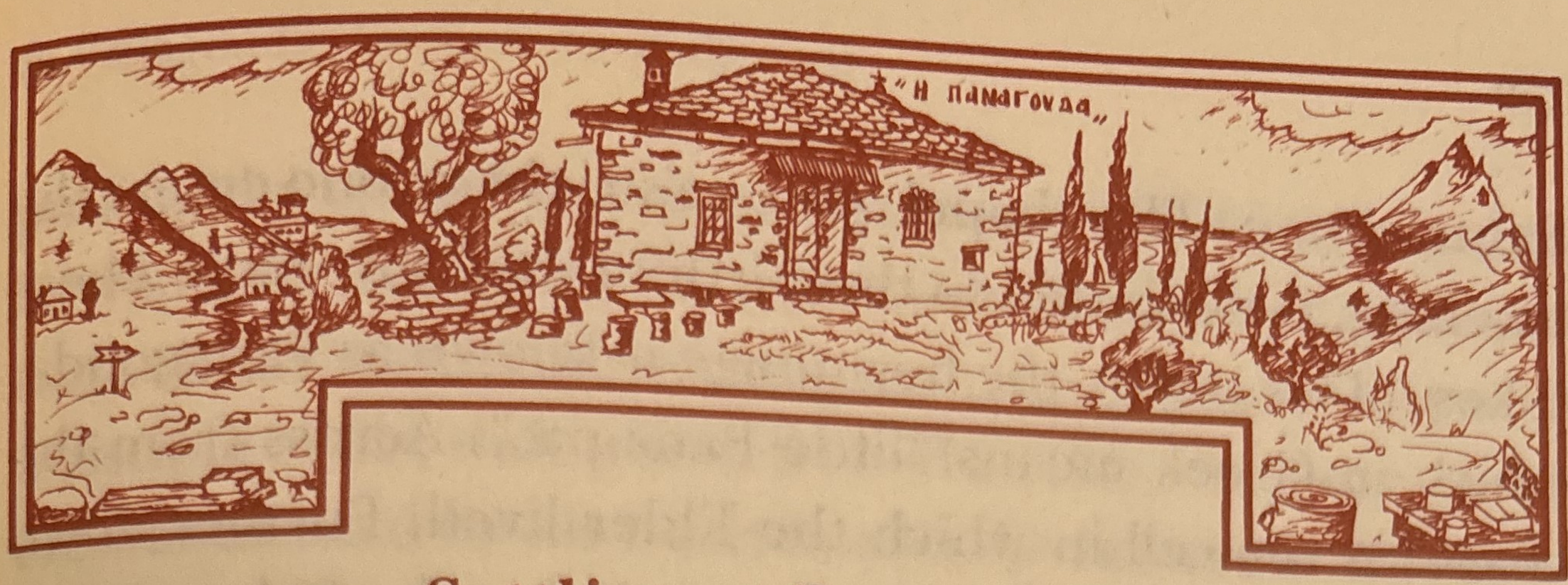


The Great Martyr Saint Euphemia
in an icon painted under the Elder's instructions.

At Panagouda
Giving to the Suffering



In the yard at "Panagouda" (June 5th, 1983)



Settling at Panagouda

After eleven years of struggling and sacrifice at the Hermitage of the Holy Cross, the Elder decided, for spiritual reasons, to go elsewhere. He was looking for a cell in Kapsala; he wanted to stay with elder Minas the Romanian, who was blind, to look after him in his old age. But the monastery to which Elder Minas's cell belonged wouldn't give him a blessing. On the road, he prayed with tears: "My Panagia, you have a place for everyone in your garden. Don't you have one for me?"

On February 27, the anniversary of Saint Euphemia's appearance to him, Elder Paisios found, on the recommendation of elder Joachim, a hermitage called Panagouda. Until then, it had been simple housing belonging to the monastery of Koutloumousiou, used by monks when they were harvesting grapes nearby. The Elder considered this a blessing from Saint Euphemia—touched, he thanked her for the provision she had made for him. The fathers of the monastery eagerly and enthusiastically accepted the Elder's request to stay, and, after he presented his letter of release from his previous monastery, they converted the structure into a cell and gave him formal permission to stay.

The Panagouda hermitage is at the foot of a hill, surrounded by thick vegetation, close to the trail that connects Karyes with Iveron, and across from the skete of Saint

Panteleimon. The chapel, on one's right as one enters the dwelling, is dedicated to the Birth of the Most-Holy Theotokos. (This is why the hermitage is known as Panagouda, which in Greek means "little Panagia.") Across from the chapel is the cell in which the Elder lived. Further down the passageway, on the right, is a cell that the Elder turned into a guest-room, and another, on the left, that he used as his workshop. Finally, at the end of the hall there is a door that opens onto a balcony with a view of Karyes.[197]

The Elder had wanted a quiet cell on the south side of the mountain, but for the sake of the pilgrims he sacrificed and settled in Panagouda, a more accessible location. It was a small, functional hermitage relatively close to Karyes, which meant that pilgrims wouldn't have to endure a long journey. Further, there were several nearby monasteries at which they could stay the night, which meant that the weight of hosting them wouldn't all fall on any one monastery.

For drinking water, the Elder ran a plastic pipe from a small spring, and he repaired an old underground cistern to store water, starting in winter, for the summer months, when the spring would go dry. He put up a chain-link fence around the hermitage, leaving two entrances. Inside the grounds, he made a tiny garden where he grew some wild vegetables such as onions, lettuce, and a few tomato vines, but nothing else.

The hermitage, old and derelict, was uninhabitable. Doors, windows, and ceilings were all missing. The floor had holes, and the roof leaked water. With great effort, the Elder began to perform the most necessary repairs. He first saw to

197. The hermitage is built on a downward slope.—eds.

putting the chapel in order, and then his little cell, so that he would be able to stay the night there. Until then, he would work all day, and in the evening walk for an hour to stay with a disciple of his, with whom he had left his few possessions. He was assisted by his disciple and the fathers at Koutloumousiou, who also used their animals to carry building materials. He didn't have money, and he didn't accept it easily either.

One day, as the Elder was going to Panagouda, his feet dragging from exhaustion, he thought, "I wish my bed were set up so I could rest a little while." When he arrived, he found that some monk had prepared a spartan bed for him, constructed from a door!

On top of strenuous work all day long, he also had guests. He would be mixing cement, and people would come with problems; and he would stop, sit, and listen to them. Returning to his work, he would find that the cement had already set. But he wasn't put out. "People have troubles. Let the cement set—that's what it's for, right?" he would joke, easing both his visitors' suffering and his own exhaustion.[198] He would climb up to repair the roof, and then pilgrims would come and he would climb down again. When they left, he would climb back up and continue. Interruptions like this happened frequently until he got settled into his cell, and even afterwards.

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198. There is wordplay here not apparent in English: in Greek, to say of something, "Let it cement," is a way of dismissing it as unimportant.—Trans.

Saints Panteleimon and Lucillian

It was the afternoon of June 2, 1979. The Elder had just moved his belongings to Panagouda, although he hadn't had time even to put them in order. Getting ready for vespers, he asked the monk who was helping him which Saint was to be commemorated the next day, but the monk couldn't remember. He told Elder Paisios that he would find out and tell him the following day, and then he left hurriedly, since night was falling.

The Elder described what happened next: "I had the Menaion in boxes. I was looking for my glasses so I could see who the Saint of the day was, but I couldn't find them. I didn't want to waste time, so I did vespers on my prayer-rope, saying, 'Saints of the day intercede for us.' When I got up after midnight, I took my flashlight and spent another half-hour or so looking to try to find out what Saint's day it was, but it was to no avail. 'Well, there goes the midnight office,' I said to myself. I didn't want to waste all night looking, so I prayed with the prayer-rope again, saying 'Saints of God,' instead of their names.

"Then I saw Saint Panteleimon and another Saint come into my cell.

'Who are you?' I asked the second Saint.

'Saint Lucillian,' he answered.

I didn't remember there being a Saint with that name.

'Lucian?' I asked.

'No, Lucillian.'

'What?' I tried again. 'Longin?'

'Lu-cil-li-an,' the Saint repeated for the third time, slowly enunciating his name.

"Then he told Saint Panteleimon to look at where they had operated on me, to see if everything had healed. Saint Panteleimon came up to me. He was wearing a white coat like a doctor. He examined me, putting his hand on my chest where I had had my lung operation. Then he said to Saint Lucillian, 'He's fine. You should note it in his chart.'"

The Saints disappeared. Glorifying God and thanking the Saints, the Elder lit a candle and discovered that the Saint of the day, June 3, was in fact Saint Lucillian.

The next morning, when the monk who was helping him arrived, the Elder, smiling, said to him, "Saint Lucillian, eh?" and told him about the appearance of the Saints.

When the Elder read the Saint's life, he was surprised to discover what some might call a coincidence: The complete life of the martyr, which is found at the Holy monastery of Iveron, is recorded in the Synaxarion on February 27, the date Saint Euphemia had appeared to the Elder.[199] He took particular joy in this connection between Saint Lucillian and Saint Euphemia, whom he revered so much as well as his discovery that the two saints were martyred at around the same time and in nearby proximities.

Afterward, he went to the skete of Koutloumousiou to venerate Saint Panteleimon. He later remarked that his icon at the monastery bore a close resemblance to the Saint as he had appeared to the Elder. From then on, he honored him each year, and he placed his icon in the church and in his cell.

This wondrous occurrence consoled the Elder and drove

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199. His life appears in the *Synaxarion* of Hieromonk Makarios of Simonos Petra (v. 5, pp. 171–172). – eds.

away the exhaustion and concerns he had suffered during his period of transition to Panagouda.

"Comfort Ye my People"

The river of pilgrims changed course: now, instead of the Hermitage of the Holy Cross, it flowed to Panagouda. And it grew constantly. The area had been quiet up until then, but now people of every age and class could be seen going up and down the trail that cut through the monastery's field. The traffic would peak with the arrival of the bus. Most of the passengers were going to see him, and they hurried on impatiently, wondering who would be the first to arrive at the Elder's. "Is this the right way to Father Paisios's?" they would ask. "Is the Elder's place down that way?" "Are there a lot of people waiting?"

The Elder received them all day long, sacrificing countless hours. Treating them to a refreshment, he would listen to their problems, pick up their crosses, take their pain, offer advice, admonish them, heal them, and even amuse them. He gave not the slightest thought to his own condition—if he was tired, hungry, thirsty, worn-out, or sick. He was grieved, however, that it interrupted and shortened his undistracted prayer. He blazed with yearning for stillness and undistracted communion with God. But, his heart, sensitive and full of love, wouldn't allow him to leave those "that labour and are heavy laden"[200] without consolation.

He discerned the best possible manner in which he could combine service to the people with the hesychastic life. His

200. Matt. 11:28

behavior was unerringly guided by his gift of clairvoyance, with which he perceived his visitors' dispositions and the seriousness of their problems—usually before he even met them—and by certain extraordinary divine occurrences.

According to one testimony, once, when the Elder was very tired, someone began to ring his bell insistently. As he went to open up, he saw Papa-Tikhon his Elder, of blessed memory, standing outside the fence, pleased, saying to him, "I'm glad to see you receive people." The incident tipped the scales of his heart in a powerful way even more in favor of this ministry.

Eventually, the number of visitors increased beyond his capacities: he was exceeding the bounds of his endurance. "I'm not my own master," he confessed. "I'm on the people's schedule. Before, my nous was immersed in the Jesus prayer. Now, I live the people's problems. A lot of times, I'm jolted awake [by their problems]!"

On the other hand, he knew that at least the majority of the pilgrims were in great need. "Don't think that people come here to pass the time of day. They've got serious problems. The thing that makes me keep going like this is that some souls are helped. I mean, I started out as a monk to lead a hidden life, but I can't because of the people. One elder told me, "Your rule, Elder Paisios, is to receive people and comfort them.' Now, how God's going to judge things, I don't know."

Naturally, for his part, the Elder longed to be alone amidst quiet, in prayer. He felt that in prayer, he contributed more, and in a more substantial way, to his brothers. Because of that, when he saw that the number of visitors was constantly growing, he had to take certain measures. For

several hours a day, he would disappear into the forest in the summer, and close himself up in his cell in the winter. Mainly, he would read the Psalter, praying for different categories of suffering people. (Of course, he made exceptions, when he was informed mystically about a serious and urgent case.)

"Sometimes," said the Elder, "when it's time for prayer, the doorbell rings. I look out the window and see someone who's a wreck. (A lot of times, when I see someone, I can tell what kind of state he's in.) So I open the door to him, and behind him four or five others rush in, people who came to the Holy Mountain as a vacation. When I finally finish with everyone, I'm so tired that I fall into bed like a dead man. The same thing happens at vespers. If I see a person in need, I'll open up to him because I feel sympathy for him. But, then, vespers is gone. Then you're neglecting your spiritual duties and daily regimen. But that's not what I wanted. I opened the door to help someone in pain, and the rest poured in, and I couldn't see how to get around it. Now, if I had done it to have some company and talk, for example, then I wouldn't be right before God."

He was considering an even more drastic solution: leaving the Holy Mountain for a long while. He even received propositions to move abroad, to a quiet and unfamiliar place in America.

But then there was a sudden and obvious change in his attitude. He stopped his beloved excursions into the forest completely, and he curtailed the amount of time he spent locked in his cell. When he was asked why, he answered enigmatically with the words of Isaiah the Prophet: "Comfort, ye, comfort ye my people, saith God" – leaving it to be

understood that he had received this as a divine commandment.[201] There is also an account stating that the Mother of God appeared to him and said, "My job is to protect your border [here on Athos], and I do it. So you, [for your part,] are to receive people without exception, because they are in need." The Elder humbly obeyed the Theotokos, and at her command accepted the work of ministering to the suffering.

Even though he received everyone who came, the people didn't change him—they didn't make him worldly. Quite the opposite: by the grace of God, the Elder transformed the people, since he sacrificed by giving to them. And he himself flourished, ascended spiritually "from the strength of action to the strength of divine vision,"[202] and had tremendous supranatural experiences. Drawing on his hesychastic experience, he used the night for prayer, along with as many hours as he could manage to spend alone during the day. When he was alone, he would bring people's requests before God in prayer; when he was with people, he would preach Christ. God and suffering people became the two axes around which his whole life revolved.

The Appearance of Saint Blaise

An archimandrite named Father Augustine had asked the Elder several times to pray that Saint Blaise of Sklavaina, a modern Saint, would appear to the Elder. Father Augustine wanted to learn what he looked like in order to have an icon of him painted.

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201. Isa. 40:1.

202. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 26:153, p. 186.

On January 21, 1980, the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, the Elder was in his cell, and Monday morning was approaching. That night, as he was praying with his prayer-rope, he saw an unfamiliar Saint appear before him amidst a light, wearing monastic clothing. Next to him, on the wall of his cell above the wood stove, appeared the ruins of a monastery. The Elder felt indescribably joyful and exultated. He thought, "Which Saint is this?" and then he heard a voice from the church: "It is Saint Blaise, from Sklavaina."[203]

To thank the Saint for honoring him, the Elder traveled to Sklavaina and venerated his grace-bearing relics—thus returning the visit, so to speak. The Elder pointed out from a distance the area where the Saint's monastery had been, since it was getting dark and he didn't have time to go there.

During his visit, he stayed with the family of Apostolos Papachristos. "On May 20, 1980," remembers Apostolos, "the Elder came to stay at my home in Agrinio. He had come to Sklavaina, in Xiromero, in order to venerate the holy relics of Saint Blaise of Sklavaina, after the Saint appeared to him in his cell. He stayed one night in our house. Even though we laid out clean, white sheets, the Elder left them completely untouched. When he went to Sklavaina, he venerated the Saint with full prostrations and taught those around him."

Afterward, the Elder commissioned an icon of the Saint from the monastery of the Holy Trinity, a woman's monastery in Koropi, Attica. He described the Saint's fea-

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203. See *O Hagios Ieromartys Blasios o Akarnan*, [The hieromartyr Saint Blaise from Akarnania] pp. 52–55 [in Greek]. (The book, however, mistakenly states that the Saint appeared in 1979; and the date is given according to the new calendar, as February 3.)

tures to the nun who would be the iconographer, and when he received the icon he was pleased, because it looked exactly like the Saint. "It's obvious," he remarked, "that the sister is a reverent person and painted the icon with prayer and fasting."

Every year he honored the memory of Saint Blaise, keeping vigil alone in his cell. He celebrated his memory, not on February 11, the day prescribed, but on December 19, the day he was martyred.

A Fragrance from the Icon "It Is Truly Meet"

"On Bright Monday," the Elder recalled, "I was sitting in the guest house saying the prayer. Suddenly I smelled a fragrance—it was really something else! I went out into the hallway to see where it was coming from. I went into the church, but there wasn't anything causing it there. Then I went out into the yard, and the fragrance became much stronger. I heard someone hitting the talanton. I looked up and saw a procession, and I realized that the fragrance was coming from the icon of the Panagia."

Every Bright Monday on Mount Athos, there is a procession with the wonderworking icon of the Mother of God that is known as "It Is Truly Meet."[204] The procession goes past Koutloumousiou monastery to the Hermitage of the Holy Apostles.[205] The hermitage at Panagouda is about two-thirds of a mile away: from this distance, the Mother of God sent a greeting, as it were, to the Elder.

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204. That is, *Axion Estin*.—Trans.

205. Also called Alypiou.

The Relics of Saint Kosmas the First

At the beginning of the Christmas Fast in 1981, the relics of the holy martyr Kosmas the First, the Chief Supervisor of Mount Athos, were exhumed. He had been martyred by the Latins in the thirteenth century, and now, after so many centuries, his relics had been found at the Protaton, the main church in Karyes.

The day after his relics were unearthed, the Elder returned to Mount Athos from a trip. When he arrived at Karyes, he went and venerated the relics with deep reverence. He could smell an overwhelming fragrance. Even the dirt from the grave, he said, had absorbed grace from the holy relics.

The following year, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the elder attended a pan-Athonite vigil at the Protaton in honor of Saint Kosmas. During the vigil, he saw a light emanating from the roof of the church above the holy skull. Totally engrossed, he reveled in this heavenly light, which others could not see.

A Goat on the Roof

The Elder hosted a young monk at his hermitage one night. He had him sleep on a wooden bench in the hallway. Placing a blanket over the fiber covering, for a pillow he rolled up a small, unused rug, and it became an excellent ascetic bed. "People who sleep on this pillow," he joked to the monk, "have visions."

In the morning, flashing him a smile, the Elder asked "So how did you sleep? Did you have any visions?"

"No, Elder," the answered the monk.

"Did you see any goats?" he asked – meaning demons.

"Not a thing."

"Yesterday," the Elder explained in all seriousness, "a police sergeant came from Karyes to talk, and we heard a 'goat' baaing on the roof."

A Multitude of Lights at his Hermitage

On the day of Pascha in 1982, two fathers, spiritual children of Elder Paisios, visited the Hermitage of Ravdouhou to greet Elder John, a deacon there, and say "Christ is risen." The Elder asked them if they had celebrated Pascha at Elder Paisios's hermitage.

"No," they replied, "we were at Koutloumousiou monastery. The Elder was there, too."

Deacon John was perplexed. He explained to them that he and some other fathers were at a neighboring hermitage for Pascha. When they left afterward, they saw a multitude of lights shining at Panagouda – the whole hermitage was bathed in a flood of celestial light! Impressed, Deacon John had said to the others, "Look at the splendor with which Elder Paisios celebrates the Resurrection. And we finished early."

But no one was at Panagouda that night, not even the Elder himself. So what could those lights have been? When the monks mentioned it to the Elder, he replied humbly, "God allowed it, to tell Deacon John something. Sometimes visitors bother him, asking where my cell is. He's human, so maybe he grumbled once or he got tired of it. That's why God showed it to him."

The Promise of the Mother of God

While the Elder was sleeping, he saw himself getting his papers in order for a distant journey. There were other people getting theirs ready as well. A beautiful, splendid lady appeared, dressed in gold, who took his papers and held them close to her chest. She told him that she would put them in order, but that it wasn't time to leave yet—it was too early. Earlier, the Elder had prayed, "My Panagia, my passport and papers aren't ready," meaning that he wasn't ready to depart for the other life.

A little while later, when he went to Jerusalem and visited Gethsemane, he saw the icon of the Mother of God of Jerusalem (see p. 306). He recognized her face as that of the lady he had seen in his dream, and he stared with such surprise that his fellow travelers even noticed. Thus he realized that the woman who appeared to him was the Mother of God, and the distant journey was his departure from this life—for which, however, it was not yet time.

In the Holy Land and Sinai

In 1982, the Elder made his only visit to the Holy Land, devoutly venerating its holy places. He spoke in awe about the great grace possessed by the Holy Land, and especially Golgotha and the All-Holy Sepulcher.

On Mount Tabor, when he went to venerate, he had a spiritual experience while he was praying—one person reports hearing the Elder say that he saw a light. Later, he showed the guard of the holy shrine the exact spot where the divine transfiguration of the Savior took place.

In Nazareth, he saw a Jewish man who was a secret Christian. The man—taking care not to be seen—reverently removed his yarmulke and drank holy water from the spring of the Panagia.[206] "There are a lot of Jewish people [there]," the Elder revealed, "who are secret Christians—they're afraid to show themselves because of persecution. Later on more will be baptized, and they'll be our closest friends."

On the Mount of Olives, he asked the monks who were accompanying him to allow him some time on his own to pray. He fell to his knees on the rock where the Lord prayed in agony before His arrest. He embraced it tightly, as though he were becoming one with it, and prayed, sobbing, for some time. The scene made quite an impression on the Roman Catholic guard there.

"Three men," said the Elder, "made an impression on me. One was the Bishop of Nazareth, Isidore [of blessed memory], and the other [a father who is still living]." For some reason, he did not reveal the name of the third man.

Afterward, he went to Sinai to help the monastery. He also wanted to stay for a time. "I want to remember the old days," he said, "and give my neighborhood on the Holy Mountain a little peace and quiet from all the people."

He found a suitable place to stay called Holy Protection, a secluded spot with a small chapel and a little cell. But he was unable stay for very long. He helped the monastery as best he could and returned to the Holy Mountain. As he related: "I went to Sinai to stay for a long time, but I couldn't. The

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206. The yarmulke (or *kippah*) is a skullcap traditionally worn by Jewish men and boys. In Israel, for the man not to have worn some form of head-covering would have definitively indicated that he did not practice Judaism.—eds.

day we had agreed to leave Greece for Jerusalem I was sick with a fever—it was really bad. It was impossible to go anywhere, but what could I do? My friend had made such sacrifices, so how could I tell him I couldn't go? I stayed in Thessaloniki for a little, recovered a bit, and pushed myself to make the trip. We went to Jerusalem before Sinai because I wanted to venerate the holy places there too.

"Then, when we took the bus to Sinai, the window was open and I caught pneumonia. You see, I've only got one lung. When we arrived, I was nearly dead. The doctor that they have there decided to give me an injection with cortisone. I told him, 'I haven't taken an aspirin since 1960, and now you want to give me a cortisone injection?' He insisted so much that I finally gave in. As soon as he gave me the cortisone, I started to have intestinal bleeding. Then he gave me shots to stop the bleeding. I was at my wit's end. If I had died it would've been a relief. 'What—me, die?,' I said to myself. 'I've still got a lot of sins to pay off.'

"But I saw that I wouldn't have the strength [to stay for long anyhow], because the desert had changed: it wasn't the way I had known it. The Bedouin weren't peaceful and quiet like back then. Now they've got cars, tools and radios, and even in the desert of Sinai you can see that restless, worldly spirit. Now there's more quiet in the monastery than out in the desert."

Energies of Divine Grace

"During the visitation of divine grace," the Elder said, "the heart leaps. One time, I was praying for fourteen hours straight, and, instead of getting tired, I felt exultation and

joy! At one point I thought, 'Since I'm so old, and missing two ribs to boot, I should put on my belt and attach it to the ceiling with a rope. If I had some makeshift crutches, too, to hold myself up by the armpits, I could keep going and give it all I've got.' And that was that! As soon as I had the thought, I collapsed, and all the exhaustion appeared. I was on the floor unable to move for fifteen minutes. It was like God was telling me, 'It's My grace that holds you up, not your belt.' It's not that the thought was sinful or proud. I just thought, 'In the condition I'm in, I should be careful.' How much more will a proud thought chase away grace? Spiritual life is so fragile, and you need to be so careful!"

The Elder had experienced something similar at the Hermitage of the Holy Cross:[207] "One time, I had been praying on my feet for hours. It wasn't just that I wasn't tired—I felt a joy I can't describe, so much joy that I didn't want to stop praying. I wanted to keep going as long as possible, so I went to put on a thick belt [to use as a brace]. I didn't even reach it before I collapsed in a heap. God had been holding me up all that time, and the moment I went to support myself with human aid, He took His strength away to show me the value of my effort."

"I was at a vigil," the Elder once related, "and I was really cold. I was thinking, 'After receive communion, after Liturgy, I'll go to my cell and wrap up in three or four blankets to get warm.'

"But as soon as I received communion, a warm feeling

207. The elder described the incident some time later, on October 27, 1978.

started spreading through my whole body. I felt divine grace spreading out inside me, just like an electric heater slowly warms up."

A Vision of a Praying Child

"One time," related the Elder, "I was asking God to show me how I should pray, when I saw a child I knew in a vision. He was kneeling down and confessing to God with tears. And then he lifted up his hands and entreated Him. Seeing that was too much for me, and I said, 'My God, forgive me, I still haven't learned to pray.' So it's good for prayer to start with a general sort of confession about our life, and then to make our requests, which should have doxology and thanksgiving in them, too."

"My Christ, Bless me"

"While I was praying," the Elder once said, "looking at the icon of Christ, I felt something inside me, and I fell to the floor and said, 'My Christ, bless me.' And right away I smelled a fragrance filling the whole cell. It lasted for a long time. Even an old rug that I had, which was full of dirt, took on the smell. I stayed on my knees, kissing that little, dusty old rug."[208]

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208. The incident occurred on March 26, 1984, and the elder related it a few days later.

"A Terrible Vision"

On April 11, 1984, Bright Tuesday, after midnight, the Elder saw a vision relating to the fearful crime of abortion. He told it to many people, and it has been published elsewhere. It is set forth here because this issue is so important and concerns so many people: perhaps it can be of help to someone. As he described the incident, "After I had lit two candles I always have burning—even when I'm asleep—for everyone who suffers in soul and body, including the reposed, I saw a terrible vision! I saw a field of wheat, but the wheat wasn't ready for harvest—it had just started to shoot up. I was outside the wall surrounding the field, putting candles on it for the reposed. To the left there was a rugged area, steep—a wasteland—and it shook with a loud roar from thousands of heartrending voices, voices that could break even the hardest of hearts. I was in pain from the sound of them, but I couldn't understand the vision. And then I heard a voice say to me, 'The field sown with wheat, which isn't ready for harvest, is the cemetery with the souls of the dead who will arise. In the other place, which shakes with those heartrending voices, are the souls of aborted children.'"[209]

"When I came around after the vision, I felt so much pain that I couldn't pull myself together. And, even though I was worn out from being on my feet the day before, I couldn't get any rest!"

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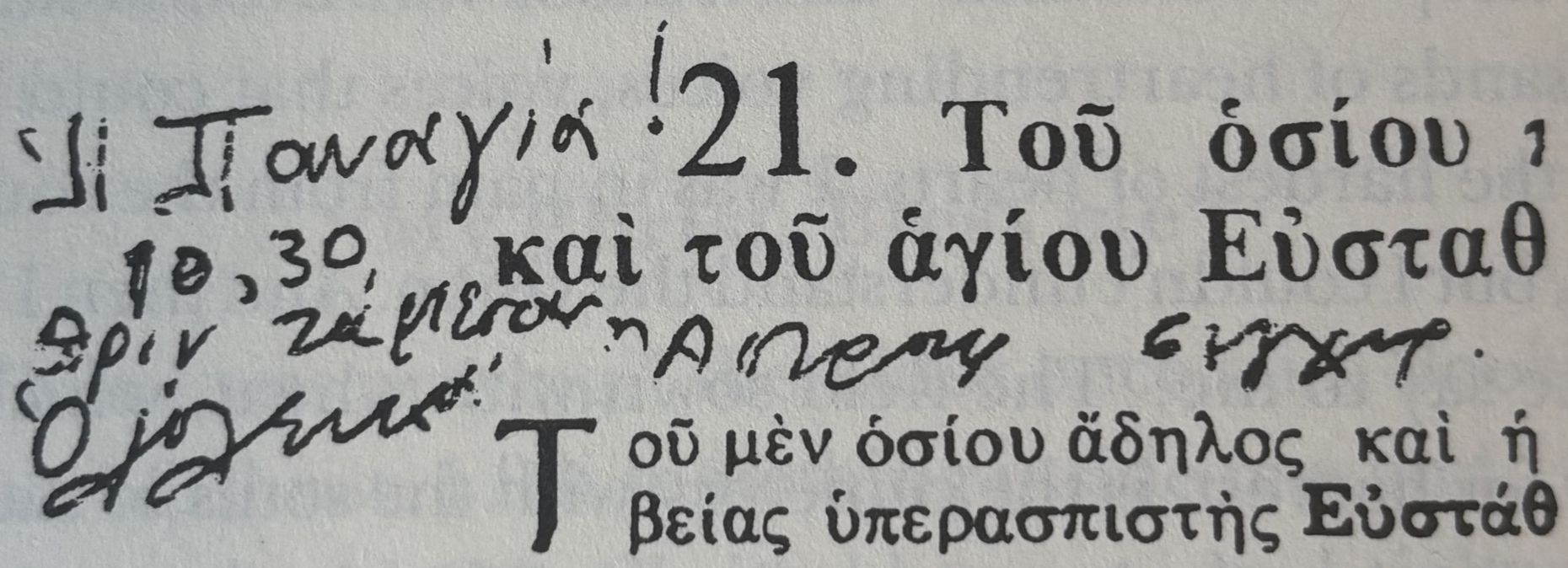
209. The elder's vision cannot be interpreted in isolation—for, read as a strict metaphor, it would imply not only that that the souls of aborted children do not enter Paradise, but also that their bodies are not to be resurrected. The elder, of course, did not think that his vision contradicted the doctrine of the General Resurrection; and he believed that the souls of aborted children enter Paradise.—eds.

"The Panagia!"

"Last Lent,"[210] recalled the Elder, "the Panagia appeared to me dressed in white. She told me that a lot of things were going to happen in the world, so I should make sure to get..." – and here she spoke of something that had to do with the Elder personally.

The immaculate mother of God had appeared near the northeast corner of the hermitage. When the Elder saw her, he said humbly, "My Panagia, it's dirty here,[211] and I'm not clean, either." From then on he revered "the place where [her] feet have stood."[212] In the Horologion, he noted this wondrous event in a cryptic way, on February 21:


21. Τοῦ ὁσίου
καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Εὐσταθ
Τοῦ μὲν ὁσίου ἄδηλος καὶ ἡ
βείας ὑπερασπιστὴς Εὐστάθ

That is, "The Panagia! 10:30 pm, in all-white clothing like lightning. Forgiveness."

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210. Specifically, February 21, 1985.

211. He may have said that the area was dirty because he sometimes discarded peelings there.

212. Ps. 131:7 (132:7).

The Antichrist, the Number 666, and Identification Cards

Father Paisios shared the people's concerns and responded to their questions. One matter that especially troubled the faithful at that time was the government's decision to issue new identification cards. Even before this, the Elder would speak about the signs of the times and the Antichrist when he thought it appropriate. In time, as bar codes containing the number "666" became pervasive, and the Greek state attempted to issue new identification cards bearing—as was revealed later—a magnetic strip, the number 666, and the semblance[213] of the devil, he expressed himself even more frequently on the topic.[214]

There was risk in speaking about these matters then—people were afraid that their opinions were wrong, but there was also the matter of how others would react to what one said. Spiritual fathers with the best theological training avoided answering the questions of the faithful and sent people to learn the Elder's views. In the beginning, it created confusion even in the Church, because, with the exception of some bright examples, people either expressed erroneous views (fortunately there were very few of these) or were apathetic.

The Elder took a position that he expressed with clarity. For him, it wasn't enough to reply to all the questions that the

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213. An image of a demonic figure, barely discernable, is meant.—Trans.

214. The elder's views about the new identity cards were based on his examination of documents brought to him by pilgrims, government employees and spiritual information.—eds.

faithful asked him about this matter. In 1987, he wrote a letter, well-known in Greece, entitled "Signs of the Times—666."[215] It was well-received and remains instructive. Because of it, many reconsidered their opinions and sided with the views of the Elder. Foreseeing that it would be needed in the future as well, he wrote it in his own handwriting and signed it, so that the record of the views he had expressed, which he held until the time of his repose, could not be altered.

Whatever he said and wrote was the fruit of prayer, spiritual sensitivity and interior knowledge. He wanted the faithful to lead spiritual lives, to be well-informed and prepared to make sacrifices, being neither indifferent nor gripped by panic and anxious worrying. He wanted the spirit of the confessors of the faith to be visible in the lives of the faithful who would be ready to confess wherever necessary in accord with their particular station in life.

When young people would ask him if they should marry, given that these apocalyptic events could occur, he would encourage them to start a family and find a job, since this is what the early Christians did in the years of persecution. "Our times are difficult," he would say, "and we'll have to go through hardships and maybe even suffer martyrdom during the storm [of persecutions] that's going to pour down on us. The only way to get through it will be to live a spiritual life. We shouldn't despair. These hard times are a blessing,

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215. We refer the reader to the elder's letter, which has been published independently; as well as to a leaflet including quotes from a recorded conversation with him about these subjects ("*Simeia ton kairon-666*". *The signs of the times-666*. [in Greek]). See also *Spiritual Awakening*, pp. 197–217.

because they force us to live closer to Christ. It's an opportunity for more struggles. The war now won't be fought with weapons: it'll be a spiritual war against the Antichrist. He'll try to lead astray 'If it were possible the very elect.'[216] Everything will be controlled by the beast, from Brussels. After the identification cards, they'll move on in a cunning way to the mark of the beast—they'll force people to be marked on the hand or the forehead. Only people who have the mark will be able to buy and sell and be taken care of. The faithful, who'll refuse, will be punished. So they should start getting used to living simply, and if they can they should have a field, a few olive trees, or an animal for their families' needs. The toughest part will last three-and-a-half years. God won't leave people without help."

He disapproved of the rationale of people who said, for example, "So what if I receive the mark? I'll make the sign of the Cross on my head," or, "I'll get an identity card and scratch a cross on top of it," or "I won't deny Christ on the inside." He would say, "If today's Christians, with this kind of thinking, had lived during the persecutions, we wouldn't have any martyrs. The first Christians didn't rationalize their situation: they confessed Christ firmly, and they were on fire for martyrdom. The pagans offered them prominent positions, and they tried to persuade them [to avoid martyrdom] by saying, 'Just say that you're not a Christian, then believe in your God privately; offer a little incense, pretend like you're sacrificing, but later on don't; pretend like you eat food offered to the gods, then just eat clean meat; don't preach here, just go somewhere else.' But there was no way they would

216. Matt. 24:24.

deny Christ. They ran toward martyrdom for Christ with joy. They were aflame with divine love."

"The Church should take the right position. It should object and ask the government at least not to make the new identification card mandatory. And it should explain everything to the faithful so they'll understand that, if they accept the identification card, it'll be a fall [into sin]."

In conclusion, the Elder believed that, "Behind the EEC,[217] there's a dictatorship of those hiding in Zion.[218] Only the devil could think up such a cruel dictatorship. The mark [of the beast] equals denial. The identification cards also equal denial. When they put the sign of the devil, 666,[219] on top of the identification cards, and I sign it, then I'm agreeing to it. It's a denial [of Christ], make no mistake about it. You deny your Holy Baptism and you put on another seal—you deny Christ's seal and take the devil's. It's one thing that there's a 666 on the currency—'render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's'[220]—but it's another matter to be on the identity card, because that's something personal.[221]

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217. The European Economic Community, a founding element of the European integration process that would produce the European Union.—eds.

218. The elder made a clear distinction between Zionism and its leaders and the people of Israel. The elder's concern with Zionism was eschatological. He, like many ancient and modern fathers, taught that the Antichrist will in the last days rule the world from Jerusalem, as part of his imitation of the Lord. The elder, as we see, held these events to be imminent, and it was in this context that he viewed the rise of the modern Israeli state, which he saw as a crucial building-block in Antichrist's approaching dictatorship.—eds.

219. Rev. 3:17.

220. Luke 20:25.

221. In this distinction can be seen the elder's traditional stance that every detail

"Even if someone accepts the mark because of inexcusable ignorance or indifference, they still lose divine grace and receive demonic energy."

This, in short, was the Elder's position. He spoke with clarity and firmness until his repose; now he guides and instructs us with his writings.

A Fragrance from Holy Relics

"I was walking on a trail with Papa-Paisios," recounted the Elder, "and the two of us smelled an intense fragrance. I realized that the relics of a holy ascetic must have been buried somewhere around there. I went another day on my own and found the spot where the fragrance was coming from. I planned to dig up the relics, but then I left them buried for some reason."

A Hernia Operation

One day when he was making little icons on the press, he developed a hernia from the straining the work required. His interior abdominal wall tore like a piece of cloth, and then he had this as a cross to bear as well. One of the problems with this was that at common vigils it was his practice to stand for hours; and, when people came to see him, he usu-

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of lived Christian faith requires careful attention. In the fourth century, Saint Theodore of Tyre appeared to warn Christians not to eat food sold in the market-place, because the apostate Emperor Julian had ordered it to be sprinkled secretly with the blood of animals offered to idols. This is an event celebrated by the Church (on the first Saturday of Great Lent), which desires all the faithful to be free from even incidental defilement. – eds.

ally spoke with them standing, so that they wouldn't dally. Spiritual children and doctors he knew entreated him to have an operation, but he wouldn't. He tried to address the situation simply, in his own practical way.

Once when he was visiting Souroti, a doctor named George Blatzas offered to help him. "Elder," he said, "what's the problem you're having? I would like to help if I can."

"I have a hernia," replied the Elder, "but I don't want an operation. Let me have something wrong with me. It's a great thing to be sick, to suffer; and not pray about it, but to pray for others. God really listens when someone who's suffering prays for other people to get better."

This went on for a few years, and the Elder suffered unimaginably. He was in great pain, though he didn't show it. He couldn't even lie down on his right side. He did his spiritual work, but with a lot of difficulty and much suffering.

At one point, he started to leave for a trip to Sinai, sick and suffering, wearing a special belt and using a cane. But Dr. Blatzas wouldn't let him travel. He had to be operated on immediately: his condition was serious and it couldn't be postponed.

So, instead of Sinai, he found himself in the operating room against his will. The doctor was a little worried about how it would turn out. Realizing that, the Elder told him, "Don't be afraid, George. I saw the operation.... Everything will be fine. The only thing I want is to ask you to put my name down as 'Arsenios Eznepidis' instead of 'Monk Paisios.'"

"Why, Elder?" the doctor asked.

"Because otherwise lots of people will come, and you'll have to put up with them."

And, in fact, the operation went perfectly well, as the Elder had foreseen and foretold. He left the hospital much improved.[222] The doctors and the nurses didn't know who the monk was they were operating on. They just said, "That monk's a mystery. A lot of monks have come through here, but he was different." Afterward, before he had fully recovered, and without going back to the Holy Mountain first, he left for a time to visit Sinai.

Surprises

Father Nicholas[223] of Mount Athos gives the following account: "I visited the Elder at Panagouda for the first and only time in 1987, with a classmate of mine [then] named John. We rang the little bell, called out to him, and waited. We rang it again, but there was no answer: total silence. Suddenly, we heard a number of delicate voices chanting in his cell. We could make out 'Holy...,' 'Holy...'

"'They're having liturgy,' I said, 'and they're at the Trisagion. They'll finish late—let's leave.'

'No, let's wait.' John replied. 'Let's not ring the bell again, though.'

"Suddenly the chanting stopped, and the Elder came out. I remember his face. It was intensely bright, in a way I've never seen since! He was by himself—there was no one else there. I wondered what all those high-pitched voices

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222. The elder entered Theagenio Anti-cancer Hospital in Thessaloniki on November 12, 1987 (according to the new calendar), where he was operated on for inguinal hernia. He left on November 18.

223. The name has been changed.

could have been. Our curiosity was piqued.

"He asked how many of us there were. Then he went back into his cell and got the key, and came toward us to open the gate. We had another surprise: the Elder was walking without touching the ground! He approached us, walking slowly. When he was within a few yards of us, we suddenly smelled a strong fragrance! We were at a loss. 'Welcome,' he greeted us.

"He gestured for us to sit down on the logs and brought us some lumps of delight. He asked what we were studying, and he took the opportunity to speak to us about the benefits of prayer, especially when the body suffers from some illness. 'Then,' he told us, 'we're paid in full.' As he was speaking, he doubled over abruptly, grabbing his stomach, and we realized that he was suffering from a hernia. 'Forgive me,' he said, politely. 'I've got that problem, too.... But, come on, you should be going.'

"We bowed to take his blessing. He lightly tapped us on the head, and we left. Before now, I've never revealed the astonishing events that we were made worthy to experience that blessed morning."

The Blasphemous Film

In 1988, there was an uproar all over Greece about the release of Martin Scorcese's blasphemous film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, which was based on the book of the same name by Nikos Kazantzakis.

In addition to the sporadic opposition to the film by faithful Greeks, the Church hierarchy decided to hold a coordinated protest on November 6–7 of that year (according to

the new calendar). The Athonite community was also asked to participate.

Many people reacted negatively to the idea, because they didn't consider it to be very spiritual to concern themselves with such matters, and they said that it is better to ignore the movie than to attract more attention to it by protesting it.

The Elder's opinion was the exact opposite. "At the time of the iconoclasts," he said, "Ten Christians forcefully defended the icon of Christ at the Bronze Door, of the palace in Constantinople and were martyred for it.[224] Now Christ's person is being blasphemed, and we must not be indifferent. If 'knowledgeable' and 'discerning' people like us had lived at that time, they would have said to the ten martyrs, 'That's not how to be spiritual. So the emperor's soldiers are coming to destroy the icon—never mind. When things change, we'll put another icon there, and it'll even be more Byzantine.' We try to make our downfall, our cowardice, our self-serving attitude appear to be something exalted. It makes me shudder."

Since he viewed protesting the blasphemous film as a confession of faith, he moved quickly to support the Church in her struggle. He exhorted others, and he added his signature to a letter addressed to Koutloumousiou monastery by monks who wanted to go to Thessaloniki for the protest. His position helped influence the Holy Community of Athos to decide in favor of full and formal participation. The presence

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224. Saints Julian, Macarian, John, James, Alexius, Demetrios, Photius (Phocas), Peter, Leontius, and Maria the Patrician are commemorated on August 9. An account of their martyrdom, which took place during the reign of Emperor Leo III in the early part of the Fourth Century, appears in the *Synaxarion* of Hieromonk Makarios of Simonos Petra (vol. 6, pp. 421–422).—eds.

at the demonstration of the Governor and most of the monastery representatives, along with abbots and a hundred other Athonites, inspired the crowd with enthusiasm and emotion. The Elder's presence made a particular impression. Despite his severe health problems, he stood throughout the demonstration. When it ended, he was in danger of being trampled by the crowd's expressions of reverence for him.

Monks and nuns from monasteries outside the Holy Mountain also took part, along with many of the laity. Their common action and prayers, including the Elder's, had good results: the state forbade the screening of the blasphemous film. Thus was the "*Last Temptation*" averted—if only it truly had been the last.

He Sees the Grace of the Priesthood

One day, the bell by the gate was ringing.[225] Looking out the window, the Elder saw a group of about ten people waiting, and he went out to open up for them. As he walked up to the gate, he commented, "If an army officer isn't wearing his uniform and cap, you can beat him up, and no one can do anything to you."

One of them replied, "Elder, we deserve to get beat up." He was the only one who understood the meaning of the Elder's words—because they had been meant for him specifically. After the others had come in, the Elder took him aside and, without asking him anything, said, "Look, what you're

225. Actually, it wasn't a proper bell, but a ploughshare hanging on the fence that pilgrims hit with a piece of iron to let the elder know they had come.

doing's not right, because now people will think that you've done something. You should wear a cassock, let your beard grow out, confess to your bishop, and ask him to assign you to do office-work somewhere. Of course, you won't serve liturgy, but remain a priest so people won't be scandalized."

The man had been ordained a priest abroad, but after reading The Rudder he had realized that he wasn't worthy to have been ordained.[226] So he had decided on his own to leave the priesthood, taking off his cassock and cutting his hair and beard. Having recognized the indelible grace of the priesthood, and seen the priest's problem by mystical means, the Elder offered his discerning council.

Transfiguration

In a hermitage in Kapsala on September 28, 1992, a vigil in honor of Saint Isaac the Syrian took place. Among the fathers gathered there was Elder Paisios, who particularly revered Saint Isaac. He participated in the vigil from a little cell, an extension of the small narthex.

The chanters all stood at the chanters' stand on the right as they chanted the doxasticon before the entrance at vespers, and an intensely solemn atmosphere prevailed in the chapel. Everyone was listening attentively. At the left chanters' stand were two Lebanese Orthodox, a cleric, and a young man. At one point, the priest was turning to say something to the young man when he saw the Elder, holding his

226. The *Rudder* is a canonical text. Reading it, the man realized that, prior to being ordained, he had committed a serious sin that bars one from becoming a priest. —eds.

prayer-rope in his left hand, levitating about a foot above the ground and arrayed in light. In fact, a powerful light was emanating from his face and hands, the only visible parts of his body! Staring at this unusual, otherworldly sight, the priest thought of exclaiming something, but he had lost his voice. Seeing his surprise, the young man turned to look and saw the same thing. The Elder was immersed in prayer and appeared content with his head slightly lowered and a gentle smile on his face. Suddenly, the light intensified, blinding them and compelling them to look away. A little later, when they managed to lift their eyes again, they saw him again in his ordinary state. Another Orthodox priest from abroad saw the same thing, from his place in the altar.[227]

Naturally, the question that arises is why only three of the fathers saw this. Twenty-five people were at the vigil, but the Elder was transfigured in the sight of only three of them.[228] Maybe they were worthy in a way the others were not, or perhaps God allowed it for some other reason. One of the eyewitnesses, who was building a little monastery in his country, had brought the plans in order to show them to the Elder. But the thought had passed through his head, "What's Father Paisios supposed to tell you? Who is he, anyway? What is he, some kind of prophet?" And the good Lord showed him who Father Paisios was.

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227. The entrances to the cell, the chapel, and the altar were all open and in a straight line.

228. See Matt. 17:1, Mark 9:2, Luke 9:28. – eds.

The Elder Responds to a Pilgrim's Thought

A pilgrim writes, "I saw the Elder with his prayer-rope folded up in his hand, and I got the idea of giving him mine in exchange for his. He turned to the out-of-the-way spot where I was sitting and said, smiling, 'What you're thinking about isn't going to happen. Mine has three hundred knots, and yours has one hundred.'

"Next time I went, I bought a prayer-rope with three hundred knots, and I showed it to him, saying, 'You won't escape from me this time, Elder – now I'll get your prayer-rope.'

"He answered, 'If you knew what you were asking me, you wouldn't ask. Well, never mind. May it be blessed: take it.'

"'No,' I replied.

'Don't put up such a fight – you want it, so take it.'

I have it as a blessing and for protection."

"Your Legs are Broken"

"It was the first time that I had gone to see Father Paisios," writes a pilgrim named Constantine. "'Costa,' he asked me, 'how did you get here? Your legs are broken.' Then he continued: 'Costa, God took her because He loved her more.'

"'Who, Father?' I asked, puzzled.

"'Your fiancée,' he answered.

"And, as a matter of fact, in 1991 I had been in a serious accident, my legs were broken, and my fiancée was killed."

Healing the Sick

"I was distraught because both of my children were sick," writes a dentist from Thessaloniki. "I went to the Holy Mountain to see pappoulis.[229] There were a lot of people waiting outside his cell. After a little while, he opened the door and appeared before us. 'Guys,' he said, 'I can only see each of you for a minute or two, no more.'

"Fifteen minutes later, he came out and said, 'Evangelos, come here.' He didn't know me—it was my first time there. So I went in, and I told him, 'pappoulis, two minutes aren't going to be enough for me. I need more time to talk to you, because I'm very upset. I came to tell you that I'm going to start burning down churches. Tell God to stop hurting my children—what did they do to Him?'

"He listened to me carefully, and again he called me by name, despite never having met me.

'Listen, Evangelos, your children are going to get better.'

"Afterward, he blessed me with a hand-carved cross he had made that contained relics of Saint Arsenios. That was my first meeting with my dear pappoulis.

"My daughter had psoriasis: every two or three days her little body would look like it was covered in snakeskin from head to toe. Fifteen days went by after my first visit, during which time, her symptoms disappeared entirely, except for a little spot on her knee. I took a towel and went back to the Holy Mountain to thank pappoulis and wash his feet (which, naturally, he wouldn't let me do). I found him digging. He

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229. In Greek "*pappoulis*" is a diminutive of the word "*pappous*" the later meaning grandpa. Pappoulis is a term of endearment, for an older priest or monk.

spoke before I could say a word: 'Evangelos, what did you come to tell me? That your daughter has a little spot on her knee? God left that there so she would remember the illness she had.'

"My son was suffering from a serious chronic illness. The prognosis was uncertain – the doctors couldn't say anything definite. The third time I went to see pappoulis, I took him with me. He was a small child. The monks who saw him would ask me, 'Why's he sleeping?' – it was just how his eyes looked.

"As soon as pappoulis saw us, he said to my son, 'Hey there, little buddy.' There was a heavy rock there – when I tried to lift it, I couldn't – and pappoulis asked my son, 'Can you lift this rock?' My little one went over to lift it. And he did – impossible! And then pappoulis kneeled down level with him and told him, 'From now on, you won't be sick anymore.'

"Just then, his little eyes opened. He no longer had the sleepy face that I, his father, had seen for the past two or three years. 'His illness went away with that rock he threw,' said pappoulis. And in fact, my son has been very healthy ever since. Glory to God!"

For years, a monk had been suffering from constipation. Finally, it caused a fissure, creating an open wound from which he was losing a lot of blood. When the Elder heard about it, he commiserated: he remembered how he had suffered from the same illness when he was at Sinai.

To begin with, he gave the monk some practical health advice. It helped him a little, but the bleeding didn't stop. After that, the monk went to see doctors and took medicine,

but it didn't bring any improvement. The Elder followed his progress, always expressing interest in his condition. Once, when he saw him after the first three days of Clean Week, he said to him, "I was thinking about you and how you were going to manage the first three days in your condition."[230]

The next time the Elder saw him, he quickly strode over to him. Immediately, without greeting him, he took him by the arms and, impatiently awaiting his response, asked him, "You're well now, right? Tell me—aren't you better?" The startled monk answered, "Yes, Elder. Glory to God, I'm better now." And indeed he was: both the hemorrhaging and the constipation had ceased.

To begin with, the Elder had tried to help the monk with human methods. But when he saw that they weren't enough, he resorted to God in prayer. Evidently, he had an interior sense of some kind that his prayer had been heard, and he simply wanted to confirm it.

"One Sunday," recalls a professor, "I felt a weight in my chest while I was in church. The next day, I visited a cardiologist, and the cardiogram showed that I had a heart condition. The doctor encouraged me to have a stress test, and I tested positive. I was diagnosed with a problem in my coronary vessels, and they suggested that I take medication for a year.

"Following that, I had another stress test, which also came up positive. Seeing that the drugs weren't working, the doctors suggested an angiogram. Naturally, I was upset and

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230. The typicon calls for a total fast during the first three days of Great Lent.—eds.

afraid. I turned to God in prayer and sent a letter to tell the Elder what was happening. He replied to me by way of Father Herman[231] that he would pray that everything would go well. So I took heart and decided to go through with the dangerous examination, which took place on March 5, 1992.[232]

"During the procedure, though I was lying in the operating room, my nous was near the Elder, and it wandered around his cell, inside and out. The examination ended, and the doctors seemed satisfied but at the same time puzzled. The doctor who accompanied me out of the operating room was eyeing me up with a perplexed look on his face. When I came to somewhat, I asked him, 'What happened, Doctor?'

"'It's odd' he replied. 'There's something unusual about your heart. We were sure we would locate the problem in the coronary vessels, but it turns out there's no problem: they're actually in good shape. Medically, there's no explanation for it, besides your heart being an unusual case.'

"Moved, I answered him, 'Doctor, my heart's not unusual—it's healthy because of a miracle, thanks to the prayers of an Athonite monk.'"

Capturing the City

Once, a group of students from the Athonite School agreed to ask the Elder if the Greeks would recapture Constantinople—the City, as it's commonly called in Greece—

231. His name has been changed.

232. According to the new calendar.

and, if so, if they would be alive to see it.[233]

They went to his hermitage, where he treated them to something, but they were too embarrassed to ask him. One of them gestured to another, but in the end no one dared to ask the question. Then the Elder said to them, "What is it, boys? What do you want to ask? About the City? We'll take it, and you'll still be alive when we do."

One boy mentioned the incident to his teacher, Constantine, who was a faithful Christian and a fervent patriot.[234] Interested, he went to verify the account with the Elder, and he too asked about the City. "Just forget it, Costas," responded the Elder; "These things aren't for us. We need to get ready for another City."

His words foretold their impending deaths: Costas died not long after that, and the Elder followed, departing for our true and heavenly Homeland, the New City, Jerusalem on high.

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233. The City (in Greek "Polis"), was established by the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great in AD 325. Officially the city was called Nova Roma Constantinopolitana, the "New Rome of Constantinople". Constantinople (Constantine's City), or just plain the City, was the name by which it was known well into the 20th century. Today's name, Istanbul, is a corruption of the Greek saying "eis tin Polin", to the City, and became the official name in 1930. In 1453 Constantine XI, the last Emperor, was killed by the invading Turks, while defending the City, and his body was never found. It is the belief of the majority of Greeks that eventually Constantinople, their true capital, will be liberated and the Divine Liturgy will once again be celebrated in the Cathedral of Hagia Sophia, where the last Liturgy was interrupted by the conquering Turks. – eds.

234. Constantine Mallidis.

First, Ask Forgiveness

"Once," relates a Pontian man named Photios,[235] "I started off from Karyes on my way to see the Elder. In front of Koutloumousiou, I met a young man who asked me how to find him. 'We'll go together,' I said.

"We arrived, and it was as though the Elder was waiting for us. 'Pontian,' he said to me, 'why did you bring him here?' I explained that we weren't traveling together, but had met on the road. 'Get him out of here' he replied. 'He needs to get up and clear out. Do you know what he did?' And he addressed the young man, angrily: 'Get out—I better not see you around here. What you did is unforgivable. First, go with tears in your eyes and ask the girl to forgive you. After she forgives you, then you can come back.' And he ran him off, which was something unusual. It was the first time I had seen the Elder like that.

"Afterward, as we were going on to Iveron monastery, the young man confessed to me what he had done. While he was at the church on his wedding day, waiting for his bride, a female friend of his came and he left with her. That's how their wedding was called off!"

"You have to have Spiritual Nobility"

"In August of 1993," recalls a cleric from a monastery in the world, "I was staying at an Athonite monastery. The abbot and the fathers there suggested that I move to their monastery, and I was praying that God would show me His

235. Photios Papadopoulos of Drama.

will. One day, I visited the Elder at Panagouda.

"I had just gone to get his blessing, but I got a lot of surprises. He took me aside and asked me, 'Where are you from, Father?' I told him. He replied, 'Father, you should stay at your monastery.' I was floored. He continued, 'You'll go through temptations, but be patient, because you have to go through them until the time comes.' Secretly, I was thinking, 'I don't understand what he's telling me.' But now that I've gone through, and continue to go through, temptations, I understand his words.

"Then he said, 'You have to have spiritual nobility. I mean: when you speak to young people, don't pressure them. That's spiritual nobility. Respect the other person, without pushing him.' Then he began to lecture me, talking about all the things that I did at my monastery. I wondered how the Elder knew that I spoke to young people, and that I pressured them too much about confession. Later, he added, 'God could make the whole world repent in a minute if He wanted to. He would turn the dial up to seven Richter – He would cause an earthquake, and you would see everyone making the sign of the cross quite visibly. But that's not sincere repentance. That's forced repentance, and it's worthless. So you shouldn't pressure them either.'"

The Swinging of the Oil Lamp

"One year," recounts an anonymous pilgrim, "when my yearlong stay on the Mountain was ending, I went to say goodbye to pappoulis, and I told him, 'I'm going out into the world afraid and sad, because nothing's changed inside me. My troubles aren't resolved. But, if you want – if you feel

sorry for me, because I'm so upset that even your words can't help me – ask Christ to swing His oil lamp a little bit to confirm what you've told me.'

"And then, while I was in agony, looking back and forth between the icon of Christ on the iconostasis and Father Paisios, who was praying silently, the oil lamp in front of Christ started steadily swinging. And I took a little oil with my trembling finger, and made the sign of the Cross with it on my forehead.

"'The Panagia's oil lamp would be swinging too,' the Elder told me, 'but then later on you would think it moved because of the wind.'"

"He's Coming ..."

"I had met with Elder Paisios of blessed memory several times at his hermitage, in Panagouda," recounts Monk Paul of the Great Lavra. "He was a true ascetic and a holy man. He was gentle, peaceful, genuine, possession-less, amiable, a man of prayer and love, and a possessor of rare spiritual gifts and a keen intellect.

"Shortly before the repose of the ever-memorable Elder, I visited him in order to profit from his counsel. I went to his cell: there were no pilgrims there, and both doors were wide open. The Elder came out. I made a prostration before him and we exchanged the usual greetings. I sat on the makeshift wooden seat and began telling him my thoughts.

"He was standing, and every so often he would whisper to himself, 'He's coming ...,' or 'Ah, it's him ...,' or 'Hmm ...,' and from his body language it was clear that someone was coming to meet him. This scene lasted about ten minutes. I

figured that he wasn't following what I was saying and thought to myself, 'He's not listening to me.' Before I could finish my thought, he said to me, out loud, 'Go on – I'm listening.' Marveling at this, I continued. Later on I had the same thought again – 'He's not listening to me.' And immediately he responded, 'Go on – I'm listening.'

"A little while later, we heard footsteps, and the hieromonk Elder Joachim, the dikaios of the Prophet Elias Skete, arrived, followed by his disciple, Hieromonk Paul. After we greeted each other, Father Paul and I stood a little ways off.

'Did you let the Elder know you were coming?' I asked him.

'No – he doesn't have a phone. It's our first time here. Why do you ask?'

"I told him what had happened, and Father Paul replied, 'It's true what they say: the Elder has the gift of clairvoyance.'"

The Hindu Leader

The Elder helped a lot of people who had gotten mixed up with yoga and Eastern religions. A Greek man who had once been a leading representative of the Hare Krishna movement recalls his experience with the Elder: "I first heard of Elder Paisios when I was in Italy. The leaders of our organization from all the European countries had gathered for a meeting, and it was there that I heard about Father Paisios. They portrayed him as a yogi who had turned up in Greece, so I decided to go and meet him.

"After coming to Greece and meeting the Elder, I began

to realize my error. When I told the leaders that I wanted to leave the group, they fought me intensely. Although I had been in charge of the whole organization and traveled all over Europe, I was now afraid just to get on the local bus. Even the most trivial tasks seemed to be incredibly difficult. My soul felt paralyzed by pain and fear. I had given the devil a lot of authority[236] in my life, but the Elder helped me to escape. If it hadn't been for him sheltering me with his prayers, I wouldn't ever have been able to break away from their satanic hold over me."

Later, the young man made a public confession of faith in a church in Athens and was received back into the bosom of the Orthodox Church by the mystery of chrismation.

A Disciple of Maharaji

Once, the Elder was visited by a rich man, who, along with his entire family, followed the Hindu guru Maharaji.[237] He had been initiated by the guru, in the argot of the movement, "he had received the Knowledge" – and they had traveled to Europe's major cities at great expense to see him.

Using his gift of clairvoyance, the Elder related various

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236. Literally, "rights"; that is to say, through his participation in demonic activity, the man had brought upon himself the interference of the devil in his life. See also p. 546 "A Foe and Persecutor of the Demons". – eds.

237. Variously known as Balyogeswar Shri Sant Ji Maharaj, Guru Maharaj Ji, Maharaji, and Prem Rawat, the guru inherited in childhood the title of "Perfect Master," the latest in a series of figures claimed to include Krishna, Buddha, and Jesus Christ. Though his public image in the West became increasingly secular in the late Seventies, he was originally openly hailed as "The Lord of the Universe." – eds.

facts about the man's own life to him, and he advised him to get a job, even if he didn't need one, saying that work would do him good.

Impressed by the Elder's spiritual gifts, the man asked him about meditation and other spiritual techniques. "Look, my child," the Elder kindly interrupted him, "techniques don't matter at all. You're trying, but where you're digging, there's no gold; there's just the devil. The gold is Christ."

The Elder and Young people

The Elder had a special spiritual relationship with young people. He truly loved them like his own children, and he prayed for them, out of concern that they find their way. Identifying with them and feeling compassion for them, he helped them overcome their difficulties and problems, he sympathized with them, and he felt compassion for them. And they, sensing his great love, trusted him unreservedly, were obedient to him, and adored him. At his cell one would see not only young people who were living spiritually and wanted to dedicate themselves to God as well as others who wanted to have families, but also drug addicts, anarchists, runaways, the mentally ill, as well as confused and suicidal youth. By means of the Elder's counsels, they repented and pulled themselves together, and when they would next visit him they would be spiritually transformed. They also became preachers of repentance to their friends, and brought them to see the Elder. A few examples of the way the Elder helped young people are recorded below.

Elder Paisios helped many drug addicts to end their ad-

dictions. To begin with, he would manage to get their attention, communicate with them, and win their trust. They listened to him attentively and took his advice; and, with his prayers and help, many were freed from this passion and became fervent Christians and good family men. "The poor kids," he would say with compassion, "they can't pull themselves together. Young people today are making themselves unfit for anything." He would tie their shoelaces, chase away the flies that bothered them, and fix their hair that fell in their faces. He counseled them to go to confession, to live a spiritual life, to find a simple job, and to keep themselves occupied. He gave them practical advice—encouraging them, for example, to eat carrots, because they are good for one's health. He would send them to surroundings where they could be detoxified and help them assimilate into society and start a family.

One young drug addict was trying to end his passion, which hurt both him and his family. He only had a vague idea of who the Elder was, but he placed his last hopes in him. "He'll have some medication to help me," he thought, as he made his way down to Panagouda. As soon as the Elder saw him, he said, smiling, "Come here. I've got some good pills for you"—and he gave him a handful of hazelnuts.

Obviously his "pills" worked—a miracle occurred, and the young man's addiction ended instantly!

An anonymous testimony: "I was present one day when a homosexual university student came to see Father Paisios. As a result of their conversation he came to repentance, and his life changed. Later, I would run into him at vigils in Thessaloniki. He would stand behind a column, shedding abun-

dant tears. He wept silently and calmly. I marveled at God's mercy and the man's repentance, but also at the Elder's grace, which was able to 'bring forth what is honorable from what is unworthy.'[238] Later, I ran into the man again at Panagouda, where he was talking to other young people led astray as he had been, so they would also be helped."

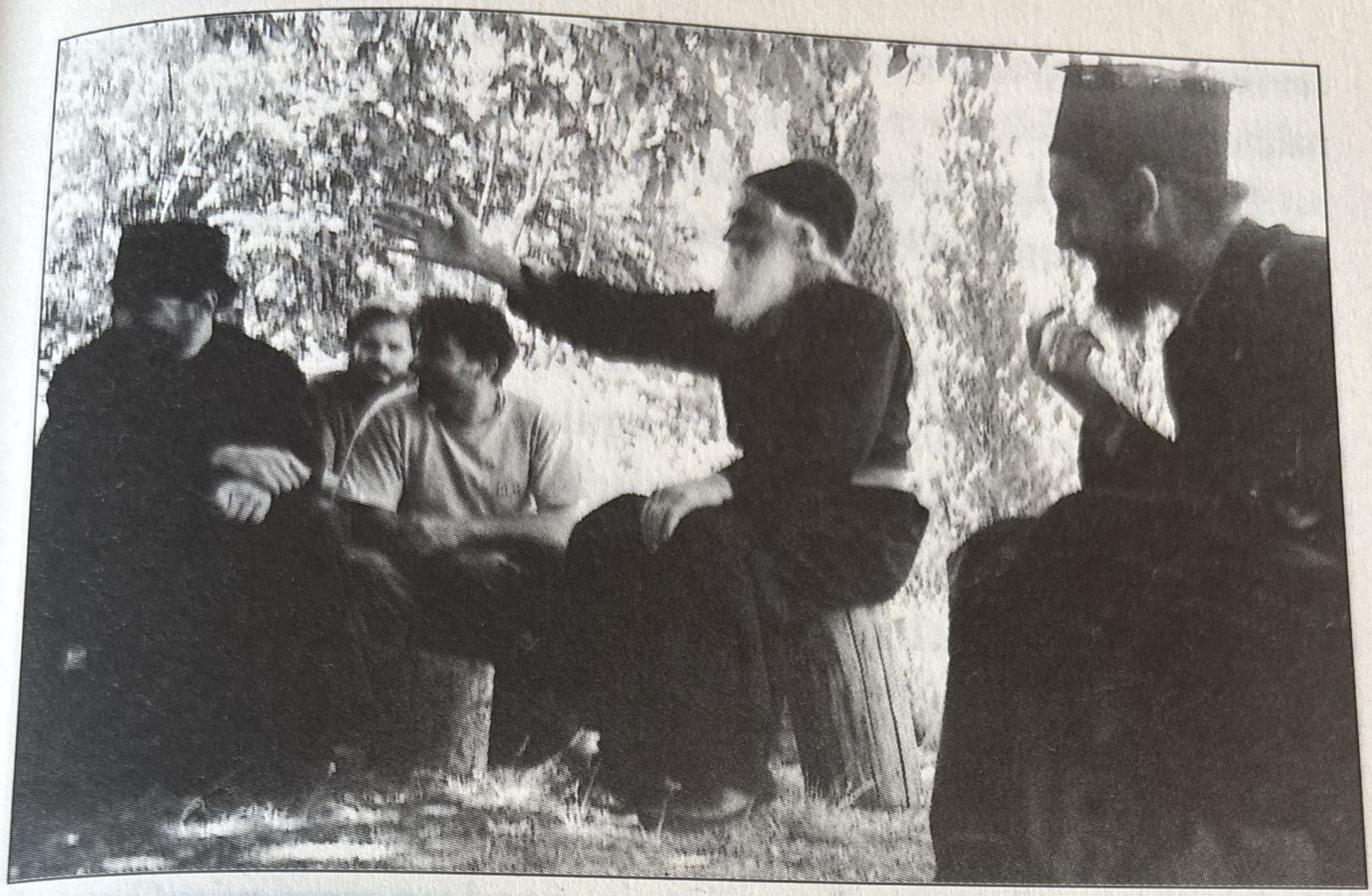
The Elder called upon the youth to pay special attention to purity, saying, "You should know that the young people today who remain pure will be counted among the martyrs of our Church on the day of judgment."

There are many cases of chain-smokers who quit their habit thanks to the Elder. His words weren't simple suggestions—they were powerful. What he said inspired a feeling of repulsion toward cigarettes and eliminated the desire to smoke. However, he helped more with his prayer than with his words.

A monk gave the following anonymous account: "I had come in order to become a monk. I didn't wear the novice's monastic cap because I still couldn't quit smoking. At the time, I was smoking two packs a day. I was trying. I would tear them up, throw them away, and then the next day I would go find them and smoke. Even though I was embarrassed, I went and told the Elder. He told me, 'You'll get up, don't worry,' and he punched me on the shoulder encouragingly.

"It was ten in the morning, and I didn't think about cigarettes at all until that evening. From then on, by his prayers I

238. Jer. 15:19.



The Elder with pilgrims.
Photographs courtesy of Fr. Gabriel Philotheitis.

never smoked again, and I became a monk. For me, it was a miracle."

Another pilgrim relates: "We visited the Elder, and I took out my cigarettes to have a smoke where we were sitting. I lit the cigarette unconsciously—I was smoking three packs a day at the time. The Elder took it from my mouth and said to me, 'You're not going to smoke again until the Germans invent a machine that cleans out lungs.' Back at the monastery where we were staying, I realized that I hadn't smoked for three hours, and that I didn't even want to anymore. I stopped completely."

Some apathetic young people came to see the Elder. They didn't want to serve in the military, as young men in Greece are required to do, and they had come up with loads of excuses for themselves. The Elder spoke to them about his own experiences in the army, and gave other examples, and by the end the boys were asking for a blessing to become commandos. "Guys," he told them, "you should do your service, and go wherever they send you."

The Elder would say that the Church teaches the faithful to follow one of two roads: monasticism or marriage. He thought it was unnatural for someone not to follow one of the two. As they used to say in his day, "The ox that doesn't go in the yoke or out to pasture goes to the butcher." He helped many young people follow their calling, either to become monks or start a family. On many occasions, he urged people toward marriage who were undecided about their path and who weren't suited to monasticism. If such a person wanted to send him something, he would refuse,

saying, "Send me an invitation to your wedding," or "I want Jordan almonds."[239] In other cases, he would help people by giving them a pleasant "rule" to carry out: "Don't come back" he would tell them, "without a wedding ring."

One time a young man with a ponytail came to see the Elder.

"Hey, buddy," asked the Elder, "What do you do for work?"

"I'm a student," he answered.

"Do you have any exams left to pass?" asked the Elder.

"Eight of them."[240]

"If you want to pass them," replied the Elder, smiling, "come over here so I can give you a haircut."

The Elder went into his cell, brought out a pair of scissors, and cut his hair. The young man thought of it a blessing, and he told others about it, who then went to get the same blessing. "I've tonsured a lot of people," the Elder would say, laughing.

"Elder," people sometimes asked, "what do you do with their hair?"

"I hang onto it," he would joke, "and I plant it on bald people."

He once said humbly, "If there's a chance I'll be saved, it'll be through the prayers of mothers. Do you know how many letters I get where they're moved and thanking me

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239. Jordan almonds are traditional Greek Orthodox wedding-favors. – Trans.

240. In the Greek university system, a student must pass a final exam for each course to receive credit for it. If he fails, he must retake it in later exam periods until he passes. It is common for students to mark their progress toward graduation by the number of exams they have left to pass. – eds.

because I convinced their children to cut their hair and take out their earrings?"

The Elder didn't want men to have long hair, because he considered it effeminate; and he would quote the Apostle Paul: "If a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him."[241] When he would see young men with long hair, he would say, "Only monks and absentminded people let their hair grow out. Which are you?"[242]

Once, some young people from Australia visited him. They wanted to live the spiritual life, but they also loved worldly amusements. They asked him about dancing, trying to pry out an approval from the Elder. "Guys," he answered them, "It's like you want to climb the peak of Mount Athos. And you can't, so you want us to bring Athos down so you can say you went up it."

The Elder thought that the influence of television was harmful for everyone, particularly children and young people. Pained, he would speak of cases where, in order to have some peace and quiet, parents would let their children watch television for hours, resulting in them being harmed mentally, spiritually, and physically. He laid stress on the physical damage that radiation from the television caused to small children and the unborn. He also spoke about demonic influences. For these reasons, he would dissuade

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241. 1 Cor. 11:14.

242. This is another witticism of the elder's, playing on the similarity between the words "*afierōmenē*" (lit. "dedicated people," meaning monks) and "*afērēmēnē*" (absentminded people). – Trans.

others from watching television whenever the matter came up, and he advised people to remove them from their homes. Instead, he counseled people to occupy their children with something spiritual, like the *Lives of the Saints*, vigils, and pilgrimages; or something neutral, such as innocent games and outings. "Don't let your children watch television," he would say. "Television only reaches to the moon. Spiritual television reaches all the way to God."

Once, he was speaking with a group of young people. A young professor, sitting several yards off, had a question that had been on his mind for some time: "Okay," he thought to himself, "that's fine for the other things on the television—I completely agree. But don't I have to watch the news, maybe, in case something important comes up?" At that instant, the Elder suddenly turned toward him and said, "Not even the news!" and then he went right back to his conversation with the youth.

A recently married man was speaking with the Elder, and before leaving he asked him for one last piece of advice. The Elder replied, "Tell your wife not to watch television, because your baby will end up with a birth defect." And then, after a small pause, he stressed, "She shouldn't even go to relatives' houses to watch television." Indeed, the man's wife had a habit of watching television at her mother's.

"I was a law student," recalls Monk Paisios, "and I visited the Elder on August 22, 1988, with a classmate of mine named Gregory. It was my first visit to the Holy Mountain. People I knew had urged me to go, because I was estranged from the Church. I went mostly for what you might call 'spiritual tourism,' but I also wanted to prove to

the Elder that there is no God and that he had wasted all his years as a monk.

"We arrived at Panagouda around four o'clock in the afternoon and found about thirty-five people waiting. They rang the bell persistently, but the Elder didn't come. We went around to the back, but it was locked. I don't know what happened inside me, but there – for the first time in twelve years of living without the mysteries of the Church – I knelt down and prayed. I said, 'My God, if You really exist and You want me to believe, make the Elder come and talk to us about You.'

"Not even five minutes passed before the Elder emerged from the woods and slowly approached us with a serene look and a very sweet smile.

'Father Paisios?' I asked with emotion.

'What do you want Father Paisios for?' he replied.

'To give him these socks and to get his blessing.'

'Bend down, so I can bless you,' he said to me.

"Not since my baptism had I received that kind of blessing. He laid his hand on my head and prayed for about five minutes.

"Later he took us to the yard outside his cell, and we sat on the logs. He spoke about God and world events as though he had heard the latest news reports, all the while offering us lots of lumps of delight.

"In the meantime, two guys who looked like anarchists arrived, and the Elder continued his talk. He also spoke to us about Buddhism, gradually, like a doctor, removing the thorns that had been embedded in me – I had done yoga for an hour a day for the past few years.

"After an hour of discussion, he turned to me and asked,

'Do you want to become my disciple?' 'No, Father,' I answered, 'I'm just not suited to this kind of thing: I love the world.' He asked the question several more times during my visit, but unfortunately I was so far away from spiritual things at the time that I couldn't grasp the magnificence of his proposal.

"Afterward he left us to go and stack some chopped wood. We said that we would help him, but he refused, saying that he did it for asceticism and that it was his obedience.

"For about fifteen minutes, we four spiritual tourists didn't speak to each other. The Elder's words had made an impression on us. With everything he said he removed my doubts about the existence of the Triune God. But at the same time, the evil one was attacking me with thoughts, which I accepted. It crossed my mind to ask the Elder secretly, inside my soul, what we must do to gain paradise. I supposed, with my vainglorious brain, that since Father Paisios was so spiritually advanced he would guess my thoughts and answer me. God had pity on me, ignoring my egotism. I saw the Elder put down the wood and come toward us with slow strides, looking deep into my soul—and no longer at my eyes. And he answered me, 'Have love and faith in Christ, my child.'

"My legs began to tremble, and my heart was beating so hard that I thought it would burst. The only thing that I was able to say was, 'Gregory, let's go,' and 'Father, your blessing.' He replied, 'Why do you want to leave? Sit down, I'll make you my disciple, and I'll even give you my name.' But my heart couldn't bear the divine revelation that had taken place inside it.

"From then on, my life changed entirely. Even though I

never saw him again, there was always an inner spiritual communication between us. His presence in my life, even after his repose, has manifested itself in an amazing way on many occasions. But the biggest miracle is that, although I had been completely estranged from the Church, he succeeded in planting Christ in my soul forever. In less than six years, I went from denying our Church to being a monk. And I received the name Paisios, just as the Elder had foreseen."

The testimony of an anonymous priest: "I visited the Elder six days before I was ordained a deacon. I pulled on the rope, rang the bell, and waited. After a while, a young man came to open the door and asked me if I was the one who was going to be made a deacon. I gave him a perplexed look, because I hadn't communicated with the Elder – I wouldn't even have been able to. I was at a loss. He told me that as soon as Father Paisios had heard the bell, he had sent him to open the door, saying, 'It's someone who's going to be made a deacon, and he wants to see me.'

"The Elder received me with a smile and his well-known spontaneous humor. He treated me to a banana that the previous pilgrim had brought him. Afterward, he took the banana peel and threw it forcefully, like a javelin thrower, into the forest. Here, he told me, they didn't have garbage cans, or a village mayor to scold them. That made me laugh a lot. When the Elder saw that I had recovered from my shock and rested a bit, he said, 'Let's go and talk now.'

"I asked him to give me advice about what I should pay special attention to so I would be a good clergyman, and he told me the following: 'There are three basic things you need

to pay attention to. First, love the Divine Services. Ring the bells morning and evening and pray the services. Second, don't be a money-grubber. Whatever they give you for performing the services, accept it and thank them, since you have a family, but don't ask for money.[243] People should see that you're not hung up on money. Third, you should love the people and not argue with them or yell at them. If they understand that you love them, then you've got nothing to be afraid of. If you do this from the beginning, you'll be successful. And, if you make some mistake later on, like everyone does, they won't pay it any mind. But if you're not careful and you don't practice these things from the start, then, even if you do a thousand good deeds later on, you won't have success as a priest.'"

The testimony of a graduate of the Athonite School: "When we were students at the Athonite School we discussed a lot of issues that were important to us. One of them, for those of us who wanted to become married priests, was finding a woman to be a priest's wife. We also discussed ecclesiastical matters and church politics—we criticized Archbishop Seraphim of Athens (1974-1998) and simply sang the praises of a certain metropolitan.

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243. As a clergyman, he would receive a salary. However, it is also customary in Greece for people to give a gift of money to clergy upon their performance of the services, particularly weddings and baptisms. The elder, as we shall see, strictly forbade monks to accept such offerings (p. 577, "Clairvoyance and foresight"), but he did not do so with married clergy, in light of the usual inadequacy of their salaries.—eds.

"A group of us went down to Panagouda, which was a half an hour away. When we arrived, the Elder opened the door and gave a staff to a student who dreamt of becoming a bishop. 'Lead the way,' he told the boy, 'since you want to become a bishop.' Before we sat down on the tree stumps in the yard, he said to us, 'Just like there are good boys who can become priests, there are good girls who can become priest's wives. So forget about that for now, and concentrate on your studies. That's the work you have to do now.'

"Then, with a serious expression on his face, he said, 'Well, what's the Archbishop done to you, that you're constantly criticizing him?' Once more, we were amazed. 'He's got something none of us does, and it'll carry him into Paradise. Which of us can lose his temper and be swearing, and then in a few minutes forget it all and not hold a grudge against anyone? Just that will bring him into Paradise, and you're committing a great sin when you judge him superficially. Can Metropolitan so-and-so' — that is, the one we were praising — 'do that? God judged that Seraphim was the most appropriate man to be Archbishop during this particular time in Church history, and greater evils were avoided because he was chosen.'

"We were amazed that the Elder knew what we had been discussing at school and responded to it. From that point on we stopped criticizing the Archbishop.

"On another occasion, in 1980, there was an earthquake just as we were preparing for the entrance exams we had to take for university studies. We had to leave the dormitory and live in tents. We went down to Panagouda to beg the Elder to pray for us.

"'What are you afraid of?' he said to us. 'Don't you have

trust in God? When we were little and we cried, our mother would rock us a little and we would stop crying. Now God rocks us a little and we start screaming and get hysterical. How can we have changed so much? Know this, and don't be afraid: nothing's going to happen to you, not even a runny nose, even if the earthquakes go on a little longer.'

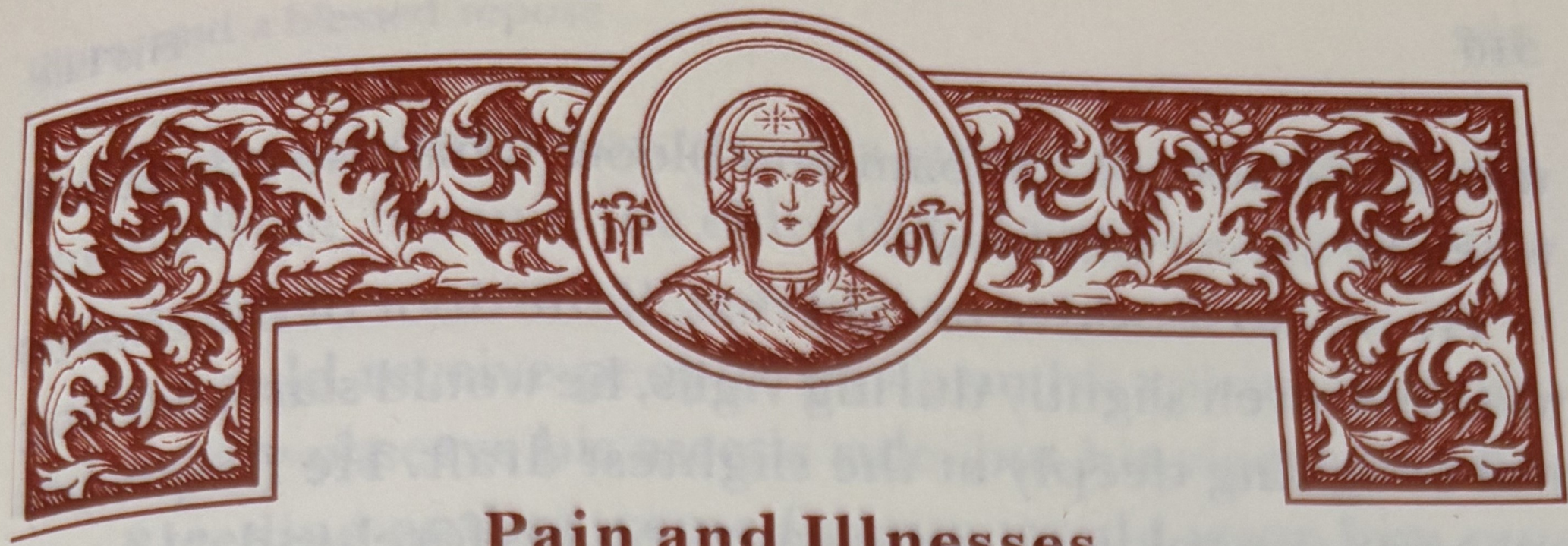
"We returned to school full of joy. That afternoon I slept in my room, despite the calls for me to leave and the continuing aftershocks. I had faith in the words of the Elder and, in fact, things happened just as he had foretold."

The hermitage of Panagouda.

The icon "Panagia of Jerusalem".

Illness and Blessed Repose

The Elder celebrates Pascha (1992) with his spiritual children.
Third from left is papa-Isaac (Atallah), the author of this book.



Pain and Illnesses

As we have seen, asceticism and pain were the elder's lifelong companions. He offered his asceticism as a willing sacrifice of love to Christ, and accepted his painful illnesses with thanksgiving and praise. He was tried with various infirmities. His suffering and illnesses had become almost a permanent condition. In sickness, he would practice asceticism; practicing asceticism, he would become sick. He was able to ignore his pain. "You do your job, and I'll do mine," he would say to his sicknesses, and continue praying, doing manual labor, or seeing people. Though he was suffering himself, he comforted others who were suffering.

Throughout his monastic life, starting from the first, he was afflicted with bronchiectasis.[244] He suffered the consequences of misdiagnosis and inappropriate treatment, he regularly spat up blood, and, finally, he endured a difficult operation.

While he was in the hospital for the lung operation, he caught a cold, and his doctors gave him a strong antibiotic on an empty stomach, although it was only supposed to be taken with food. It felt, as he put it, "like someone was peeling my guts." After that, his health became extremely delicate. At the slightest cold he felt discomfort, his stomach became

244. See p. 163 ("Lung surgery"). —eds.

upset, and he spit up foam and blood. This also happened when he ate certain foods.

He was so sensitive to cold that, if the door of the church was open even slightly during vigils, he would start sneezing and coughing deeply at the slightest draft. He frequently put a paper napkin or some gauze on his forehead. "I had a headache," he explained, "and a monk from Stavronikita said it would pass if I put a paper napkin under my cap. It worked for me, since it makes my head warmer."

With the arrival of the first cold weather in September, he would light up his wood stove, which warmed him, but also gave away his presence to visitors. Whenever he knew someone was in need, no matter what condition the elder was in, no matter how sick he was, and regardless of cold, rain, or snow; he got up and opened his door. He would put his visitors in the warm guesthouse, and he would go to the church, which was very cold, where he would see each one in private. Sometimes it took hours.

No matter how difficult or painful it was, the elder endured his poor health while glorifying God. He didn't grumble, nor did he ask God to heal him.

For five or six months, he suffered from a slipped disc, which caused him great pain. The same thing had happened to him on Sinai, when he tried to pick up a heavy piece of granite. He was in a lot of pain. Sometimes he propped himself up with two canes, and he had a very difficult time serving the people who came to him.

In his last years, he had frequent intestinal bleeding, which worsened over time. It reached the point where he would have to relieve himself constantly at night, as many as nineteen times, and he wouldn't pass anything but blood.

His doctors didn't know exactly where the bleeding was coming from, because the elder didn't want to have examinations done.

He would receive people, perform his spiritual duties, and strictly observe his ascetic rule, but his vigor was waning. Bleeding and extreme fatigue would wear him out. "Sometimes," he said, "I feel like withering away."

Two years before his repose, he went to celebrate Pascha at a hermitage with some other fathers. He said jokingly to the elder there, "Papa... either your cell's gotten further away, or I'm getting old – which is it? I guess I'm getting old."

He saw his strength disappearing. His condition was getting worse, and his bleeding didn't stop – it was uncontrollable. But, in spite of everything, he endured without turning to medical exams and medication. From God, he sought only one thing, intensely: to help his suffering brethren, who kept coming to ask for his aid. How could the good Lord not be moved to hear his prayers?

"Something Happened to Me"

"While I was in this condition," he recounted, "something happened to me. I was lying down in bed, and I took the icon of Saint Arsenios and pressed it to my belly – and I felt a power coming from it."

He regained his strength, and he continued his struggles and his service to the people for a time. He had all the same symptoms – bleeding and the rest – but he felt strong.

At the Limit of his Endurance

But this did not last long. His condition again declined, and he began to feel faint. At times he would even fall unconscious in the yard of his hermitage, and when he came to he would thank God that no one had seen him. Once there was even snow on the ground. "You would have seen me lying there," he described it later, "'like a wine-skin in the frost.'"[245] On the second Sunday of Lent in 1993, as the Divine Liturgy was served in his chapel, his exhaustion reached its peak. He began to breathe heavily, his eyes opened wide, and for a little while his breath sounded like a death rattle. Out of reverence, however, he resisted sitting down. He fainted, falling forward, but the other fathers caught him before he hit the ground. When he regained consciousness, they insisted that he sit down, but he refused. After Liturgy ended, thinking nothing of his own critical condition, he tried to tend to the fathers present, despite repeated fainting and vomiting. Afterward, he didn't let anyone stay with him. He remained alone, "as a man without help,"[246] humanly speaking, committing himself in his suffering to God's mercy.

He lost so much blood that his face turned pallid. People who knew him tried to help however they could. They suggested iron pills, but he declined them, joking, "I've got a lot of iron around here – what I need is steel."

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245. Ps. 118:82–83 (119:82–83). ["Mine eyes are grown dim with waiting for Thine oracle; they say: When wilt Thou comfort me? / For I am become like a wine-skin in the frost; yet Thy statutes have I not forgotten." – eds.]

246. Ps. 87:4 (88:4).

The elder wasn't worried about his condition. The only thing that he asked was that God mercifully arrange for his hemorrhaging to stop when Divine Liturgy was served, so that he could commune; and, for a time, this happened. He, better than anyone, understood his illness and knew his end. He felt it approaching, though he didn't share this information with everyone.

He had spent his whole life contemplating death. He had built his bed like a coffin, and wherever he would go to live, he would dig a grave. But now he started making allusions about death to his spiritual children, preparing them for his departure. Speaking about his body and soul, he would say, "When a house falls apart and starts leaking, the owner doesn't want to stay inside." For so many years he had safeguarded the angelic Schema of his elder, Papa Tikhon, as a blessing, but now he cut it into pieces and portioned it out. He had made crosses and little icons on the press, and he directed that they be divided up after his death as a blessing, so others would forgive him. He had prepared a cassock for his funeral and, on top of that, he placed the following note:

These are for my funeral. I'll be glad if you keep the new clothes and dress me in the old, dirty ones, because I'm not clean myself. Pray for God to be merciful to me.

Monk Paisios

Learning of the elder's ill-health, the Ecumenical Patriarch sent him a message telling him to go to a doctor for examinations. Oddly enough, his hemorrhaging stopped for a while. With simplicity, he asked a disciple, "I have to

be obedient to the Patriarch, of course. But now that the bleeding's stopped, I'm excused, right? What do you think?" After a while, the bleeding started again.

People spoke about the elder's attitude in a variety of ways. Some were scandalized, because they thought he was endangering himself. Others marveled at the fortitude and bravery with which he confronted his trials. And many, especially those who were sick, were benefited and consoled when they saw what the elder endured despite his illness.

Many other fathers begged him to take care of his health, telling him, "We need you." Others gave him instructions, and still others watched his torment silently, with grief of soul, and prayed. Each person judged and acted according to his own thinking and spiritual condition.

His Final Departure from Athos. His Illness Progresses.

As he did every year, in 1993 the elder celebrated the memory of Saint Christodoulos at a neighboring hermitage belonging to some of his spiritual children, since the Saint was its patron. Afterward, he went to the Monastery of Koutloumousiou to see the abbot, Archimandrite Christodoulos, to wish him well on his nameday. The next day, October 22, he left the Holy Mountain for Souroti to celebrate the vigil for Saint Arsenios, as he had become accustomed to do over the previous few years.

But this trip was to be the elder's final departure from the Holy Mountain, and he would never return, not even after his repose. He attended the vigil at Souroti and, as usual, he stayed for a few days afterward, in order to speak with the sis-

ters and visitors who were in need. He intended to return to the Holy Mountain afterward, but he developed an intestinal blockage. This caused his bleeding to stop for a little while, and it forced him to submit to the pleas for him to undergo examinations.

In brief, his sickness progressed as follows:

At Theagenio Hospital, his doctors diagnosed him as being in an advanced stage of cancer. He had had it for six years, though it didn't appear to have spread. George Blatzas, the reverent surgeon who had operated on the elder before, was worried about the test results. "Don't be like that," the elder told him. "Okay, I have cancer – I'll be obedient and do whatever you tell me to. Case closed."

At the doctor's recommendation, he underwent radiation therapy prior to the removal of the tumor. Each time he went for a session, there would be many people waiting for him to tell him their troubles. His difficulties were increased by the fact that his bowels had to empty thirty times a day, which caused him tremendous pain. But he kept his smile and comforted the sick people around him. He had concealed his monastic name when he had been admitted for his hernia operation; but now, knowing that he would soon depart, he allowed it to be made public, and he received everyone who wanted to see him.

The operation took place on February 4, 1994.[247] Doctors removed the tumor from his large intestine, but the disease had advanced with terrible speed, spreading to the lungs and liver. The doctors informed him that they would have to perform a temporary colostomy, to which the elder submit-

247. According to the new calendar.

ted with his usual good cheer.[248] Later, a second procedure was performed, reversing it. He also agreed to chemotherapy.

During his CT scan, the elder suffered a lot. He was in a wheelchair, in pain, and trembling from the cold. He gave his turn to another sick person, and he waited in the hallway of the hospital for a long time. Then, when the time came for his examination, the machine broke down. In the end, a car had to come to take him to another place for the scan. It was discovered that the cancer was still spreading rapidly in his lungs and liver, yet he was joyful and good-humored the whole time, telling his usual beautiful jokes as though it were someone else who was sick. He consoled and comforted everyone around him.

Helping Others Amidst Agonizing Pain

Both before and after the elder's operation, at Souroti and in the hospital, many people came to see him, to tell him their problems and to ask him for forgiveness. This added toil to his pain and suffering, but it was unavoidable.

"Elder," someone asked him, "how can you leave your spiritual children?"

"Well," he replied, ""The days of our years are 'threescore years and ten' – that's enough..."[249]

"Elder," asked another, "since we need you so much, why

248. In fact, he replied to the news with a pun: told he would require a *para fysin édra*, (colostomy), the elder replied that he didn't want to be made a *paredro* (deputy).

249. Ps. 89:10 (90:10).

don't you pray that God will heal you?"

"What? Should I play games with God? After all, I asked Him to give me this sickness."

"Elder, give me a final piece of advice to remember," entreated one of his spiritual children.

"We should have spiritual nobility," the elder replied, "because when we have that, we become Christ's kin."

The elder met with with the sisters of the monastery, who were doing so much to give him relief. He advised them and gave them his final counsels.

At Theagenio Hospital, there was a cancer patient named Lampros from Trikala. He was extremely thin—withered-away—and he was confined to a wheelchair.

After persistent efforts, his wife was able to see the elder. He told her that Lampros would get well, return to Trikala, and enjoy his family; but that a little while later he would fall ill once more and die. The patient's condition involved many complications, and, scientifically speaking, such an improvement was impossible. Nevertheless, everything happened as the elder foretold, and, in the end, Lampros died after about six months.

On Bright Thursday in 1994, a woman named Eriphyle visited the elder.[250] She describes her visit: "In the summer of 1993, my daughter Antonia, who was then eleven years old, developed vitiligo on her hands and the edges of her lips.[251] According to doctors, recovery from this disease is

250. Eriphyle Tsikas of Volos.

251. Vitiligo is a condition in which the skin loses melanin, causing milky-white,

very difficult or even impossible. We began treatment with cortisone, but it had no effect, and we were extremely disappointed.

"We went to see the elder in Souroti. He received me and my three daughters, smiling despite his terrible pain. After I told him about my daughter's illness, he took the child's little hands in his and, looking deep into her eyes, he asked 'Why do you mourn so much my child?' (In fact, my daughter had been grieving since the death of her father in 1991.)

"Then he turned to me and said, 'Eriphyle, my child, don't worry—it's nothing [serious], and it's not hereditary. She suffered this because of her tremendous grief.'

"Suddenly, he asked me, 'What do you want to happen?' I answered him, 'For the vitiligo to stay where it is.'

"He then made the sign of the Cross over her with his holy hand and told me, 'Everything will be fine.'

"Sure enough, it didn't spread. For ten years now, she hasn't gone back to the doctor or had any treatment. I asked for the disease to stay where it was, rather than disappear, to remind my daughter and our entire family, throughout our lives, of the grace and blessing of the elder that helped us so much."

One month before the elder's repose, His Eminence Metropolitan Panteleimon of Xanthi, who at the time was still an archimandrite, visited him. "There were two small chil-

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slowly enlarging patches to appear on the body. Its exact causes are unknown. The increased incidence of the illness in some families has led scientists to investigate heredity as a factor. Some sufferers have reported that the condition was triggered or worsened by single events, among them periods of emotional stress.—eds.

dren with us," he recalls: "They had cut some wild flowers, which they offered to the elder on their own accord as soon as we entered his cell, leaving them on his pillow. 'You see,' he said to me, 'The children know what they're doing.' I wanted to tell him that we needed him to live and that we were praying for him. But he told us that he had already been praying for something else; and, with his ever-graceful attitude, he said he was curious as to whom God would listen to in the end. Later, he asked me if I had brought any letters for heaven. It was an opportunity, he added, for him to deliver them postage-free. He said this with his immutable character for conveying joy, joy which was evident on his gentle face."

"We went to see the Elder at Souroti," recalls father Timothy Tsotras abbot of the Monastery of Saint John the Russian in Kassandra, "with Metropolitan Synessios of Kassandra, of blessed memory and Father Agathangelos.

"After we had venerated the icons in the church of Saint Arsenios, we went to the small meeting room. The elder saw us coming and came out to greet us. We were astonished to see him inside a supranatural light, not using the stairs but approaching us in the air!

"After they gave us some refreshments, the bishop stayed a little while to speak with the elder, and then we left. We had gone about thirty yards, accompanied by the abbess, when His Eminence commented, 'You see, holiness can't be hidden. He was flying, and all light.'

"'He's following us,' said Father Agathangelos in a low voice. Even though he was gravely ill, the elder was coming up behind us to pay his respects to the bishop.

"The bishop turned around, and, seeing the elder, smiled and asked him to return to his bed so as not to tire himself out."

A Blessed, Unnoticed Repose

"The last time I saw him," relates Dr. Blatzas, "seven days before he reposed, I was worried. I often wondered whether we were doing the right thing for our patients. He told me, 'Listen, George. Everything happened like it was supposed to. You're worthy of your hire. Don't worry. I want you to know, whenever you need me, I'll be near you.'

"'Elder,' I told him, 'your liver has swollen because the cancer has metastasized so much, and you're in pain.'

"Smiling, the elder replied, 'Ah, don't worry. It's my pride and joy. It took care of me for seventy years, and now it's sending me where I have to go as fast as it can. Don't worry yourself about it – I'm just fine.'

"He had an oxygen tank that he used sometimes, because he was also having trouble breathing. His pain was growing more intense, but he wouldn't take pain-killer injections: he didn't want the pain to be completely gone. He only took a little cortisone so that he would be able to tend to himself until he gave up his spirit.

The elder wanted to return to the Holy Mountain, to fall asleep and be buried inconspicuously in his spiritual homeland, the Garden of the Mother of God. He had even asked one of his spiritual children to arrange a suitable place for him to stay during his last days, since he wouldn't be able to stay at Panagouda alone. He got ready to leave on a Wednesday, thinking he would arrive on Monday, but his condition

suddenly worsened. The civil governor of the Holy Mountain offered to have a helicopter come for him, but his doctor said that he might die in transit. (The elder, naturally, wasn't comfortable with the idea of traveling like this either.)

He made plans to return as soon as his health improved a little, but once again his condition worsened. Behind these difficulties and obstacles was concealed the will of God – that the elder would be buried in the world. The people would need him just as much after his repose as they did when he was alive. And so he decided to stay and to be buried at the monastery in Souroti, near his saint. Before making his final decision, he most likely received explicit guidance from God.

He told those around him, and they brought him his Great Schema and veil from the Holy Mountain.[252] He chose his burial-place and gave instructions about his funeral.

In his last moments, he asked two bishops he knew who had come to see him to read over him the prayer of forgiveness and the prayer for one about to repose; and also to read the funeral service, during which the elder himself chanted. He communed on a regular basis – he would go to church on his own, toiling despite the difficulty. When people suggested that the priest come and commune him in his cell, he refused, saying, "I have to go to Christ, not the other way around."

His suffering intensified until it equaled the sufferings of the martyrs. Seeing him calm and peaceful, an Athonite monk asked him, "Elder, aren't you in pain?" "I've gotten used to it," he replied. Indeed, the elder had been familiar

252. An Athonite wears the veil and the Great Schema mainly when he is on the Holy Mountain, and so the Elder would not have traveled with them. – eds.

with suffering throughout his life. He didn't panic or grumble: he endured and glorified God. He was now reflecting, noetically retracing the tortures of the holy martyrs. "The asceticism I practiced all these years as a monk," he would say, "hasn't done me as much good as my illnesses have."

Occasionally he would chant, to dispel his oppressive pain and to prevent making unintentional groans.

He had stopped seeing people. Now that the end was approaching, he didn't want even the sisters to come into his cell. When he needed something, he would knock on the wall, and a sister would come. He wanted to be alone, to pray without interruption and to better prepare for his departure. He took care of his own physical needs till the end, suffering unimaginably, but he was joyful and peaceful.

On the feast of Saint Euphemia, Monday, July 11, according to the new calendar, the elder communed for the last time, kneeling at his bed since he was no longer able to go to church.

The elder's last night was agonizing. Amidst his pain, he called upon the Mother of God: "My sweet Panagia," he would say. They would try to take his pulse, but they couldn't find it. Only when he breathed was it clear that he was alive. He felt and understood everything that was happening, and he prayed continually. He only lost consciousness for two hours. When he came to, he said in a feeble voice, "Martyrdom, true martyrdom," and he reposed peacefully. It was eleven in the morning on Tuesday, July 12, 1994—the date according to the Old Calendar was June 29, the memory of Saints Peter and Paul, first among the Apostles. He was laid to rest behind the church of Saint Arsenios, and no one was invited to or even knew about his funeral. It had been the

elder's wish that his funeral would take place inconspicuously.

What happened when his repose became known, three days later, is indescribable. A mob of people poured in from everywhere to venerate his tomb, and there were spontaneous outpourings of love and reverence. Some spoke of him as a saint. Some, out of reverence, took a little dirt from the top of his grave. Anyone who had a personal item of his considered it a great blessing.

At Panagouda, his hermitage on the Holy Mountain, there was a "devout pillaging." Pilgrims squeezed under the wire fence and climbed up on the terrace. They took whatever they could find, so as to have a blessing from the elder: cups, knives, pieces of wood, papers, muddy rugs, rope, and even the logs that he had used as stools.

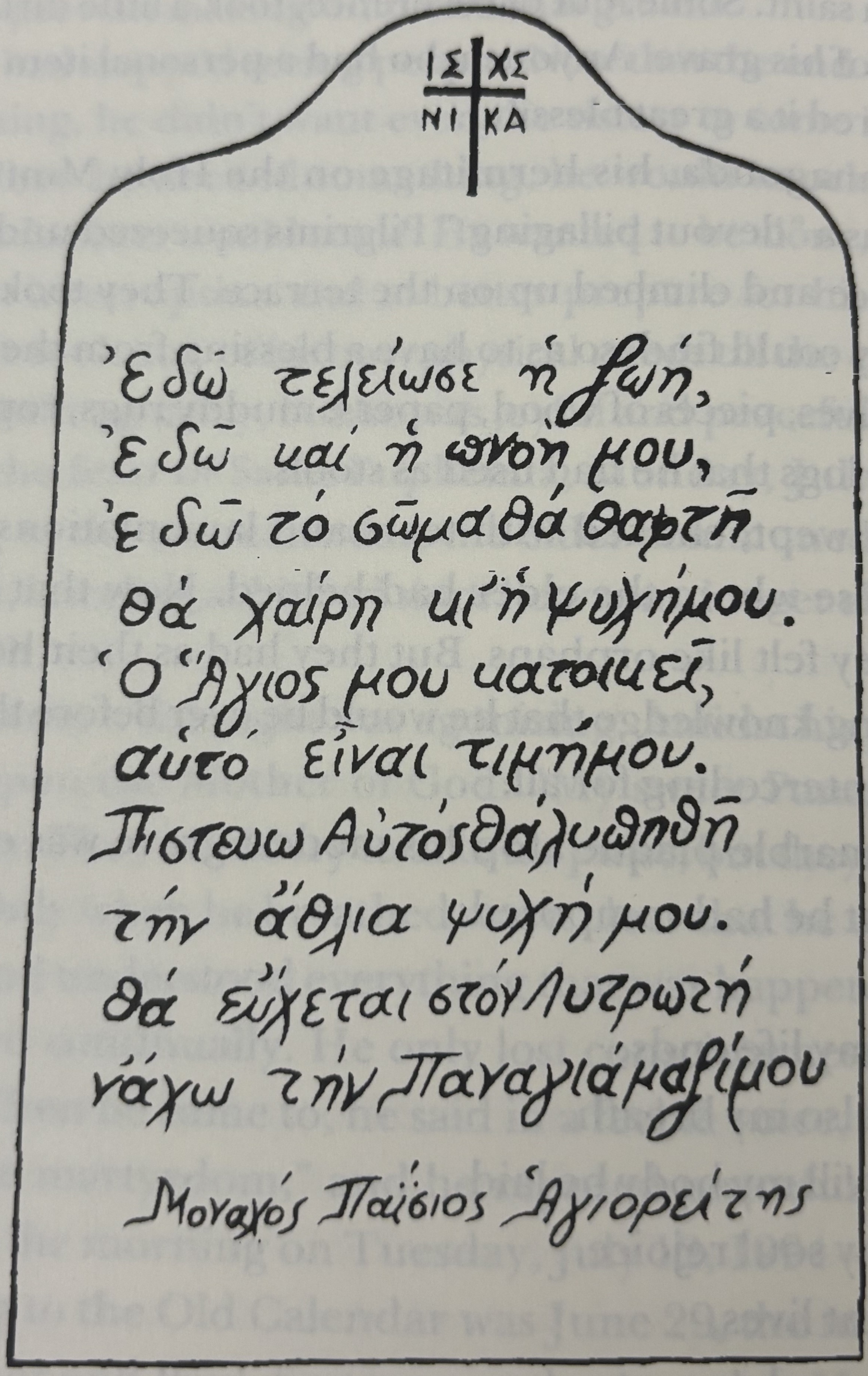
Many wept, choked with tears and lamentations, especially those whom the elder had helped. Now that he was gone, they felt like orphans. But they had as their hope the comforting knowledge that he would be ever before the Holy Trinity, interceding for all.

On a marble plaque atop his modest grave was etched a poem that he had composed:

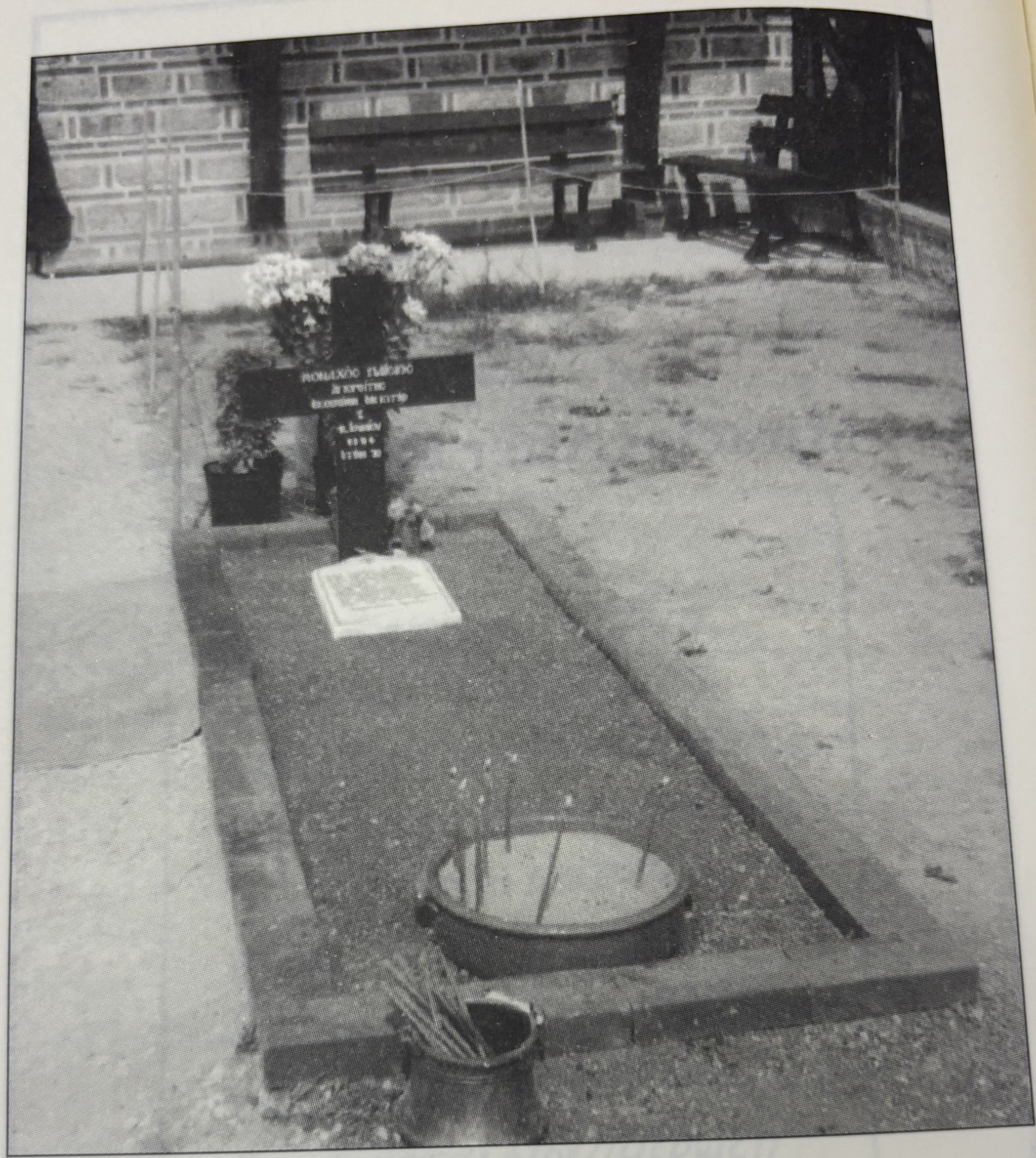
Here my life ends,
Here also my breath.
Here will my body be laid
And my soul rejoice.
My saint lives,
This is my honor.
I believe he will pity
My wretched soul.

He will pray to the Redeemer
That the Panagia be beside me.

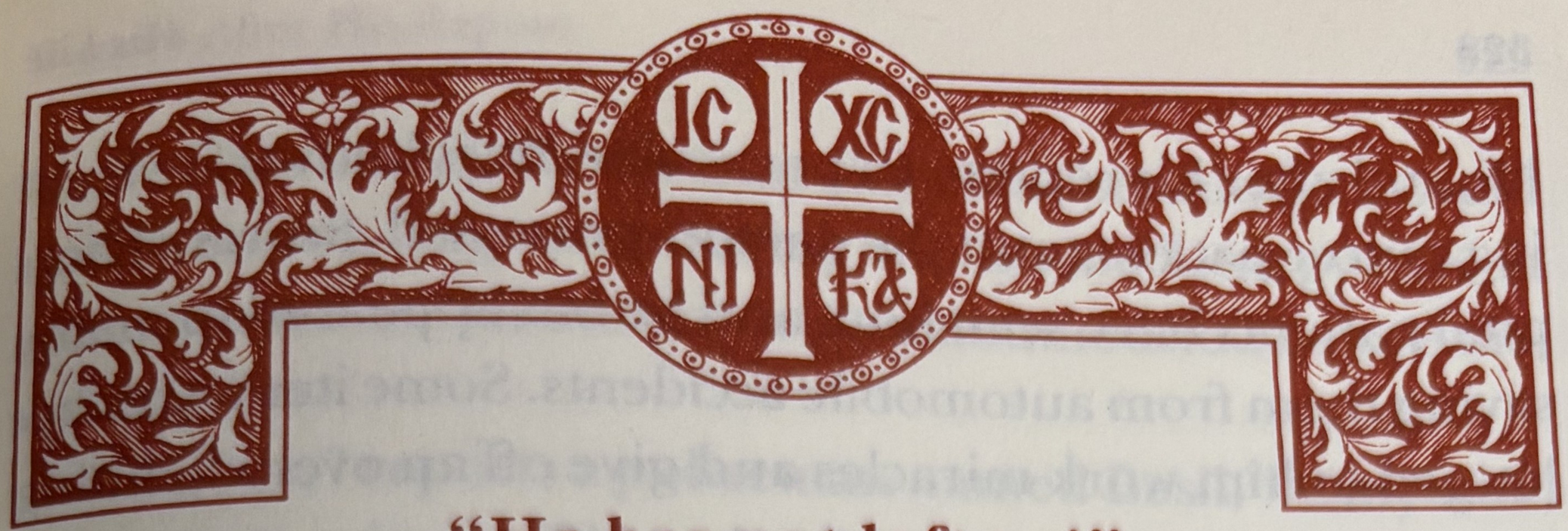
Monk Paisios of Mount Athos



Miracles After His Repose



The Elder's simple grave at the Sacred Monastery
of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti.



"He has not left us!"

The elder continues to help people even after his repose. "For not only when he was in the flesh did he work miracles among men, but even after his death ... he has not left us, but watches over us and cares for us with assistance even greater than before."[253] Freed forever from a corruptible and frail body, he can run faster and more easily to those who call on him in faith. He has even come to the aid of many people who had never heard of him and who were indifferent to the faith. People flee to the elder and ask for his intercessions because they believe in his holiness. His grace-filled tomb has become a place of pilgrimage for Orthodox from around the world, gathering together the suffering, comforting the afflicted, and granting great blessings. It has become a new pool of Siloam, where the infirm are healed and many other miracles take place. His little hermitage on Mount Athos has also become a place of pilgrimage. It is visited daily by pilgrims who knew the elder, those who want to thank him for his help, and those who simply want to see where he lived.

We see that the miracles of the saints—appearances and healings—have taken place both during the elder's earthly

253. *The Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, p. 81. The text refers to Saint Euthymius the Great.

life and after his repose. In particular, he is known for healing cancer patients and the demon-possessed. Scores of hospital patients have seen him, and he has appeared to many, saving them from automobile accidents. Some items that belonged to him work miracles and give off an overwhelming fragrance.

The miracles worked by the elder after his repose are innumerable, and new ones are constantly taking place. As substantiation to this assertion, a select few are recorded here, testified to and confirmed by eyewitnesses.

Heavenly Fragrance

The gift of heavenly fragrance associated with the elder in life did not disappear after his repose. Many pilgrims smell a sweet aroma when they venerate his tomb or visit his hermitage on the Holy Mountain. Others smell this fragrance coming from his personal articles or clothing. The fathers who came later to live in the elder's hermitage bear witness to this. " In the beginning," notes one father, "after his repose, almost everyone who visited the hermitage could smell this distinct fragrance. The area outside the wire backdoor, where the faucet was and where the elder stored lumps of delight, was especially fragrant. At the faucet, many people who toiled and thirsted received refreshment, both from the water and, even more, from the elder's words."

The scent later diminished, but it never went away. A reverent pilgrim once went to venerate in the chapel, and, as he stepped out into the hallway, he was hit with a strong wave of fragrance.

"The year that the elder reposed," recounts a clergyman,

"there was a liturgy for the feast-day of his hermitage. I could smell a strong fragrance during the Divine Liturgy, which accompanied me all the way to Koutloumousiou before dissipating."

"In 2001," reports a policeman named Basil,[254] "my wife, Helen, was going to Thessaloniki, so my son Nicholas, who was suffering from kidney stones, could be examined. With her she had a book written by Father Paisios. At some point [before the examination], she had the book open, and for ten minutes it gave off an inexplicable fragrance—my son could smell it too. The examinations took place, and they indicated that he had no problems whatsoever; and he's been quite healthy till today. From then on, my wife wouldn't be separated from that book."

The testimony of Peter, from Drama: "I didn't know Elder Paisios. God enlightened me and I came to repentance two years after the elder's repose.

"I had bought all of the books by and about Father Paisios, but I hadn't read any of them. But after I bought the last book, I dropped everything and started reading in earnest. Every night, after finishing my prayer rule, I would read five pages. And every time I opened the book to read it, I sensed a heavenly fragrance rising from the book. I had a lot of books, but the fragrance only came from this one.

"There was a table in front of some icons where I would sit and read. One day, when I was near the end of the book, I began to read my usual five pages. Suddenly, I saw a blinding light streaming out from the icons like a waterfall. The light was so bright that I couldn't look at it. I lowered my

254. Basil Tsolakis of Lykostomo, Pella.

head and tried to open my eyes and to look to the left or right, but the light's reflection was so bright that I couldn't even do that. So I completely closed my eyes. This went on for about twenty or thirty seconds. I made the sign of the Cross and sat there by myself trying to understand in a state of amazement just what it was I was experiencing for the first time in my life."

An anonymous testimony: "On February 10, 2005, on the feast of Saint Haralambos, I went to visit one of my co-workers because it was his name day. I had one of Elder Paisios's books to give him as a gift.

"Later, around seven that evening, he called me, full of emotion. 'I started to read the book,' he told me, 'And right away I was in a good mood and it moved me. Without realizing it, I read for about an hour, and then something amazing happened. The book started to give off a fragrance that was so powerful that I was blown away. It flooded the whole room. It was the first time in my life I had experienced anything like that.'"

He Casts out a Demon

"I had been suffering from a demon since the age of twelve," recalls a man from Thessaloniki named Evangelos. "My life was torture. After the exorcisms they would read over me, I would feel as though I had been beaten up.

"My spiritual father planned for us to go to Souroti for a vigil on the first Saturday of Lent in 1995. Before we set off, I sensed a fierce war being waged. During the vigil I didn't feel sleepy at all. I was sitting down in the center of the church, and the nuns were all around. The vigil ended, and

they started to read the prayers for the blessing of the water. I went wild. They took me to kiss the relics of Saint Arsenios. I had never felt like that before—I shudder when I say it—it was like my body was on fire. Afterward, I turned and said 'Pai—, Pai—' and the abbess asked me, 'Paisios?' I nodded my head in affirmation. Then I turned really wild, and I started to scream. They took me to the elder's grave, and three times I shouted the word "Saint." I wanted to leave, and I was trying to, but they were holding me down, pinning me on my back on the elder's grave. And then I saw Elder Paisios sit up, rising at the waist as though he wasn't dead but just waking up. It was him—with his beard and cassock. It happened in a matter of seconds: he touched his hand to my forehead, and at that moment I saw black smoke coming out of my mouth. I calmed down completely, but my physical pain didn't stop right away. I fell asleep, and I would wake from the pain at intervals, saying, 'It hurts a lot.'

"But, for forty days, I felt so much joy that I wept. Perhaps it was rash of me to say what I did: 'My God, let me suffer a whole lifetime like before—if only I would feel this joy again, even for just one minute.'"

A Child's Deliverance

Father Christos,[255] a parish priest with nine children, relates: "Some of my children were playing on the terrace of our house, and at one point they started jumping on the skylight. One of my boys, who is six years old and still doesn't

255. Father Christos Tsantalis of Nea Michaniona, a parish priest in Kerasia, a suburb of Thessaloniki.

speak well, wanted to jump too. Falling through a gap, he dropped like a rock, falling four flights. I ran to the bottom of the skylight shaft, my heart pounding, to pick up the little one. I was stunned when I saw him coming toward me, pale from fear. I took him to the hospital. The doctors examined him and said that there was nothing wrong with him, not even the slightest injury.

"We realized that this was a miracle, and I thought that the wonderworking icon of the Panagia of Nea Michaniona had saved the child. I took him to her icon and asked him, 'Did she protect you?' He replied, 'No.' He led me to the photograph of Father Paisios and pointed to him [so as to say, 'He held me']."

Appearance and Aid to a Student

"It was July of 1995," recalls a civil engineer named Christos,[256] "and I was preparing for my September final exams for the department of Civil Engineering at the Vocational School of Athens. But it was just hopeless. I had to pass ten exams to graduate,[257] and I had promised my family and friends that I would get my degree that September. It was impossible for me to keep my word. I was extremely worried, and in the grip of anxiety.

"At my mother's urging I bought the book *Elder Paisios* by Hieromonk Christodoulos and started reading it. The elder's kindness made a great impression on me.

"It was midday on an unbearably hot Sunday in July. I

256. Christos Nikolopoulos of Agrinion.

257. See note 240 p. 297.

was alone at home, reading the book and thinking sadly about the exams and my approaching failure, when I heard the balcony door slam shut. Right away, I thought, 'How could that have happened? The leaves aren't even swaying!' Before I had finished thinking about that, I felt as though someone had entered the house, and I was instantly filled with great peace, indescribable sweetness, and an unfamiliar joy. I said to myself, 'I hope this feeling never ends! What is this?' I turned around and saw the holy Elder Paisios, as though he were standing there blessing me, and then he disappeared. At the same time, the state I was in ceased. I thought he had gone down the stairs, so I leapt up and ran like crazy downstairs, and then back up again—nothing. I went out on the terrace, but I didn't see him there either.

"I sat down and thought about it all and got a better idea of what had happened. Filled with awe, with a shaking hand, I immediately began writing it down so I wouldn't forget.

"When September came, I passed all my exams and received my degree. 'How did that happen?' everyone asked me. 'That's unbelievable!'

"'But,' I said to myself, 'That's not the only thing that's unbelievable.' Glory be to God."

Appearance in a Dream

"I had been given some medication for osteoporosis," recalls Katie Patera, "and I had lost over twenty pounds in a very short period of time. I wasn't feeling well, and I was severely exhausted. One night, before going to sleep, I looked at the photograph of the elder and told him, 'Father, I'm not well.' He came to me in my sleep. He told me, 'I came because you

asked for me. Have a good look at the prescription for your medicine,' and, instantly, he was gone. I jumped out of bed, and reading the prescription I saw that the medication was actually for obesity. If I had kept taking it, I would have died. We don't see him, but the elder is at our side."

Miraculous Aid

"I am a plumber by trade," reports a Cypriot named Nicholas.[258] "One day, in July of 1997, I had finished a job and was getting my tools together to put them in the car. It was nightfall, and I couldn't see well. There was a clothes-line there, and hanging from it was a cord with a three-quarter-inch hook at the end. I gathered my tools and, as I got up to go to the car, the hook caught my eye. I froze, caught like a fish on a fishhook.

"I shouted for help as loudly as I could. The owner of the house ran outside and, seeing what had happened, he told me that he would take out the hook. I told him not to, because I was afraid he might blind me in the process. I sent him to get a pair of pliers from my car, so he could cut the line and take me to a first aid clinic, to have the hook taken out there.

"He went to get the pliers while I waited, distressed and weeping: I had three children, and I didn't want them to have a blind father. At that moment, a thin man in a black cassock appeared in front of me. As soon as I saw him and made the sign of the Cross, I felt myself tremble, and I felt his hand under my cheek. He jostled my head upwards, and

258. Nicholas Xynaris of Paphos, Cyprus.

the hook came out of my eye.

"When the man came back with the pliers, we went to the clinic. When the doctors examined me, I told them what happened, but they didn't believe it. There was a laceration in my pupil, so they gave me an ointment and told me to keep my eye covered with gauze for three or four days.

"Walking into a store the next day, I saw, high up on a wall, a photograph of the man who had appeared to me. I asked the woman who owned the shop who it was, and she replied that it was a very well-known monk named Paisios. I had to have the photograph – it was priceless to me. I asked her if I could buy it, and I told her I would give her whatever she wanted for it. She gave me a book about Father Paisios. I read it the same day, and since then I've kept the book in my car for protection."

Invisible Presence

In 2000, a moved pilgrim recorded the following account: "I had visited the Mountain when the elder was still alive. Our large group had started off to go visit him after getting directions from Iveron Monastery, but unfortunately we got lost on the way and weren't able to meet him.

"In 1998, when I visited the Holy Mountain again, he had already fallen asleep, so I went to venerate at least the chapel at his hermitage. I felt tremendous serenity and joy! But, as I was leaving, I felt weighed down with an equally heavy burden: 'Why wasn't I made worthy,' I thought, 'to meet the elder before, when he was still alive? If just his hermitage filled me with so much joy, what an unimaginable blessing his presence would have been! Why do I have to be such a

sinner that I missed it?'

"Burdened unbearably, I was trying not to cry. I was following the path to the cobblestone road to Iveron, thinking these thoughts, when I suddenly felt an arm hug me tightly and then slap me on the back affectionately. At the same time, I heard a comforting voice say to me, 'Well, take care, young man.'[259]

"Simultaneously, an intense fragrance filled the area, and an indescribable exultation filled my soul—the sadness I had felt before disappeared completely. Even though he didn't appear to me in person, I felt like I had met the elder."

Intervention in Traffic Accidents

One day, a man from Kalamata who lived in Athens was driving to Ioannina, when he was involved in a serious head-on collision. His car was literally smashed to pieces, and he suffered a serious head injury. He was taken, unconscious, to the hospital and placed in intensive care.

While he was in this condition, he saw an elderly monk in the midst of a bright cloud. The man didn't have any particular relationship to the Church, but a few days before an acquaintance had told him about a grace-bearing monk named Elder Paisios. So, in his surprise, he impulsively addressed the unknown monk, "Are you Elder Paisios?" The elder didn't answer him. He smiled, gently caressed his head, and said, "Don't be afraid, you'll be fine!"

The man regained consciousness. Though he was con-

259. It is worth noting that both the words and the gestures were very typical of the elder, something that the pilgrim did not know at the time.

fused by the strangeness of what had occurred, and although he didn't know the identity of his miraculous visitor, he believed his reassuring words. The man described with unmistakable conviction what he had experienced to his doctors—who, surprised by the humanly inexplicable improvement in his condition, confessed that they had witnessed a true miracle.

After he was discharged, he looked in the window of a bookstore he was passing, and he was surprised to see a picture of the monk who had saved him on the front cover of a book. He had discovered the identity of his benefactor, and, being full of gratitude, he bought the book and read it.

Moved by what he read, in January of 1998 he made a pilgrimage to Panagouda, and this is when he offered his account. The elder's intervention, in addition to saving him from certain physical death, radically changed his life. He sought out a spiritual father and went to confession, abandoning the worldly life despite intense opposition from his relatives. "I can't keep doing the same things,' he said, with tears in his eyes. "The elder's bright, smiling face is always coming to my mind."

"Two laymen visited Panagouda," recalls an Athonite monk. "After they had venerated in the chapel, they asked to hear something about the elder. Among other things, I mentioned that we had received many accounts from pilgrims of miraculous signs performed by the elder, even including miracles performed after his repose. These, I told them, included appearances, healings, interventions in traffic accidents, and so on. As soon as I said the words 'Traffic accidents,' one of the pilgrims got tears in his eyes, 'Did you hear

that!' he said emphatically to his friend. 'Traffic accidents!'

"At the end, they asked me to tell them about at least one miracle, and preferably one involving deliverance from a car accident. So I told them about a recent incident, mentioning at one point a witness' experience of 'a monk in a bright cloud' who appeared him. At that, the first pilgrim burst out loudly, 'And to me too, in a cloud!'

"And he told me of his own miraculous deliverance, briefly, because he was too emotional to say more. 'I was speeding on my motorcycle at eighty-five miles an hour ... I slammed into a car ... A bright cloud opened up before me and a monk appeared ... I wasn't hurt at all!'

"'Go through some books,' my wife urged me, 'and look at the photographs to find out who it was.' I discovered him in a calendar from the Athonite School, in a photograph with some students – he saved my life!"

"Some time ago," reports a reverent married priest studying in Thessaloniki, "a young man came to me and said, 'Father, I should have died yesterday, but God saved me. While I was speeding around on my motorcycle, I hit a car and was thrown a long way. At that moment, I saw an old man grabbing me firmly by my right arm, and I didn't get hurt at all.'

"I showed him some icons of saints and pictures of contemporary elders. As soon as he saw Elder Paisios, he shouted, 'That's him!'

"A few days later, he came back and told me that he had discovered two small icons in a little pocket on the right arm of his jacket, exactly where the elder had grabbed him. One was of Christ and one was of Elder Paisios – his mother had

put them there secretly, before the wreck.

Spiritual Resurrections

The majority of the elder's miracles—and the greatest ones—concern spiritual transformation. Many people with no interest in spiritual matters, convinced atheists, rejecting moral boundaries, were spiritually resurrected by one of his posthumous appearances; or, more often, by reading one of his books. Zealously entering the Church, some even became monastics.

For example, one young man was living in ignorance and sin until, not by chance, the elder's *Epistles* fell into his hands. The book affected him deeply. He changed his way of life, and desired to become a monk.

"Six years ago," confesses another of the many young people helped by the elder, "I was an anarchist. I wore earrings and took drugs. A friend gave me one of Father Paisios's books. I flipped through it out of curiosity, and I was so interested in it that I finished it in a single night. My life changed from then on."

Another man recalls:[260] "One Sunday in October of 1996, I went to church with a friend of mine at the Monastery of Saint John in Kareas[261]. I wanted to have a memorial service for my mother, who had reposed one year prior. It was the first time I had gone to church in years.

"When the liturgy ended, we went to the monastery bookstore, where I saw a book by Elder Paisios. My heart

260. George Nikolaou of Ambelokipoi, Athens.

261. The monastery is located in one of Athen's suburbs.—eds.

skipped a beat. I bought it immediately, and when I got home the first thing I wanted to do was read it. When I read the poem he sent his mother when he was a new monk, something inside me changed. I started sobbing, my heart softened, and amidst my tears I began to say, 'My God, help me to become a monk too, through the prayers of the holy Elder Paisios!' It wasn't something I had thought about before then—it came out by itself. And the amazing thing is that today, six years later, I'm actually preparing to become a monk!

"Suddenly, while reading, I lost all sense of time and space for a few seconds, and I saw the holy Elder Paisios holding my mother of blessed memory by the hand. I was shocked, because what I saw was so vivid. I talked about it with a discerning elder, who told me that it was something true and not a demonic illusion. I started going to church every Sunday and on feast days. Later, a little before Christmas of that year, I confessed for the first time in my life. I felt a great exultation in my soul—I had never felt like that before. Only Christ brings peace to the soul.

"In May of 2002 I was found worthy to visit Panagouda to venerate the chapel. During my visit, from time to time I could smell an overwhelming fragrance, even outside in the yard."

There was an army officer who was a believer in the twelve gods of Mount Olympus—he even tried to convert the members of his unit. He read a book about Elder Paisios, and within him the idols of Olympus were thrown down all at once, and he believed in the true God. He now frequents the elder's grave and gives his photograph to others.

A Tumor Disappears

"In the year 2005," relates a woman from Thessaloniki,[262] "a small tumor appeared on my right eyelid. The doctor told me that they would have to operate, since otherwise there was a danger that it would grow and obstruct my vision.

"I went to Father Paisios's grave, took oil from his lamp, and spread it over my eyelid daily, begging him to heal me. One day, as I was cleaning the crystal on the dresser, I saw something fall onto it. Taken aback, I looked to see what it was and where it had fallen from. I then realized that it was the tumor from my eyelid. I glorified God and thanked Elder Paisios who heard my prayer and spared me of going through surgery."

Healing of a Demoniac

One morning in December of 1996, a remarkable incident took place in the bookstore of the monastery at Souroti. Present were the sister in charge, a married couple with a little girl and her grandfather, two middle-aged women, and a young man. All of a sudden, there was a loud cry. One of the middle-aged women – who was fairly stout – crashed to the floor and began thrashing around and yelling wildly, rapidly throwing her head back and forth. It was a terrible sight. The young mother took her child outside while the others went to help the woman. She growled and snorted; and in a savage, sinister, male voice she said, "You don't believe – I'll set you straight, I'll show you... Just a little

262. Vasilike Kofidis.

longer now and I'll put the 666 on everybody's hand... you'll all worship me ... losers, idiots..." and continued with other insults.

Then she began to shriek and looked frightened. "Paisios," she shouted, "you're burning me—you're burning me! You want to send me back to Tartarus... And this loser, all she does is take me to monasteries... Why are you helping her? You're burning me—you're burning me!" And she screamed more loudly. She was thrashing about so violently that the others were afraid she would fracture her skull. It was clear that it was a demon that was torturing her.

"Ahh!" she yelled again. "Now Mary's here ... you're burning me, Paisios!" And then she became still, as though she had fainted.

Those present hesitantly drew near to help her. The women made sure that her clothes covered her and were straightened out before helping her up. Opening her eyes, she wept calmly and silently. Gratitude flowed from the depths of her heart.

"Thank you, Elder... Thank You, my God," she said, over and over, with much gratitude. When she got up, she went over to an icon of Christ and the Mother of God and broke down in sobs. "My God ... My God—how did You lower Yourself to someone as unworthy as me? Thank You, my God; thank you, Elder... My God, I wasn't worthy of such help."

The whole scene was deeply moving. Afterward, they gratefully said goodbye to the sister and left. As she was leaving, the woman revealed that she had had a demon who had been mercilessly tormenting her. The previous night she had seen Elder Paisios in her sleep, and he told her, "Come

to my grave, and I'll make you well." She came to the monastery, asked where the elder's grave was, and venerated it; and then they went into the bookstore, where the events related above took place.

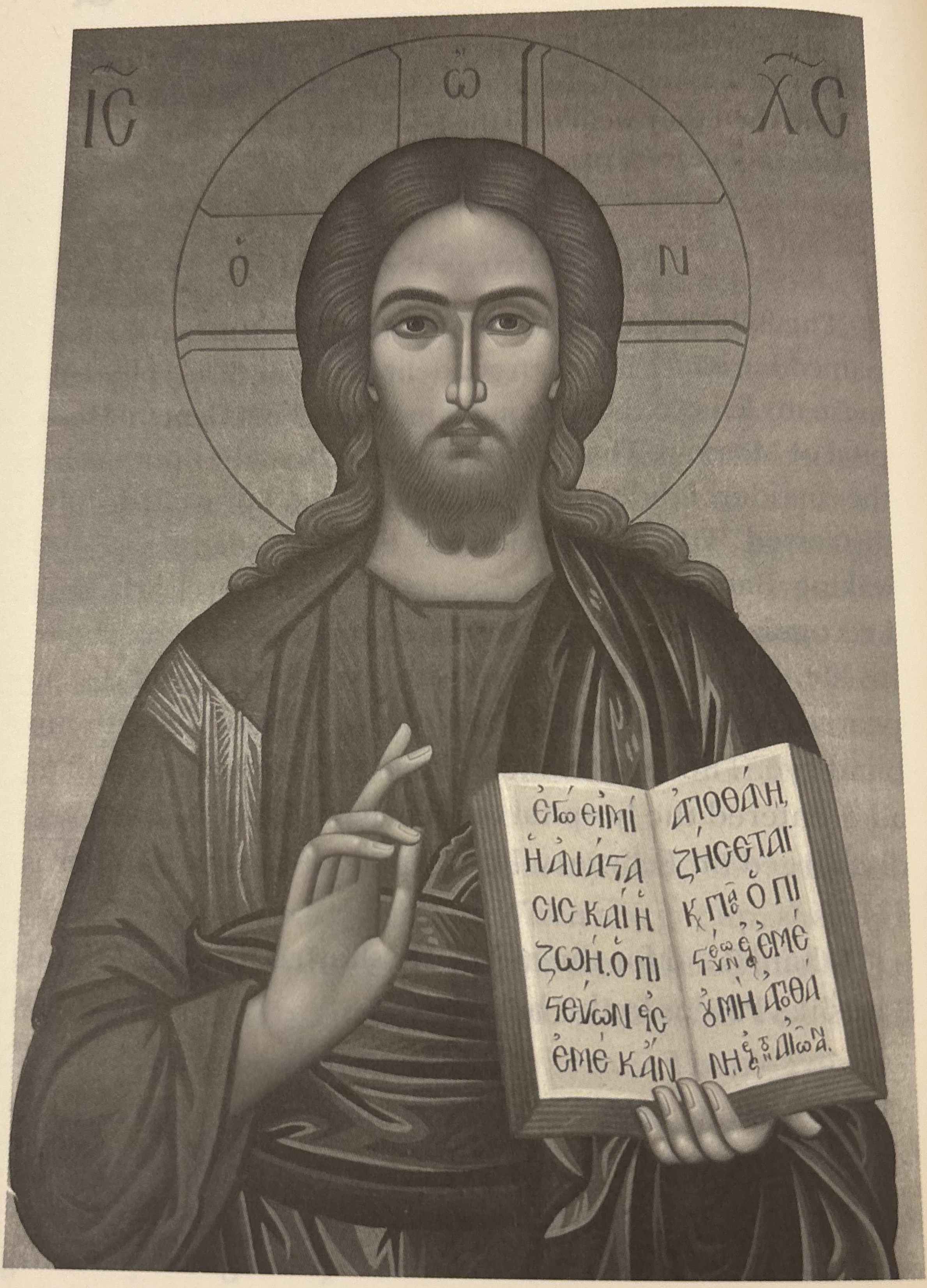
He Restores Eyesight

The following miracle was reported by a Russian doctor named Larisa:[263] "I had an accident that completely blinded me in my left eye. They brought me to the First General Hospital of Moscow. The rooms were all full, so they put me in the corridor. I didn't sleep at all that night. I prayed, deeply distressed. Toward morning, as I was between sleep and waking, Batushka Paisios appeared.[264] I saw him clearly, and I recognized who he was because I had read a book about his life. He covered my head with a small towel and disappeared. At that instant, I realized that I could see with my blind eye. The doctors didn't have to do anything for it at all. I entered the hospital on February 4, 2002, and I was discharged on February 11. My patient-history number is 31171.

"I thank God for the mercy He showed me, and I thank Batushka Paisios for his help."

263. Larisa Nikolaevna Maslova of Moscow.

264. *Batushka*: an affectionate Russian term for a priest or elder. – Trans.

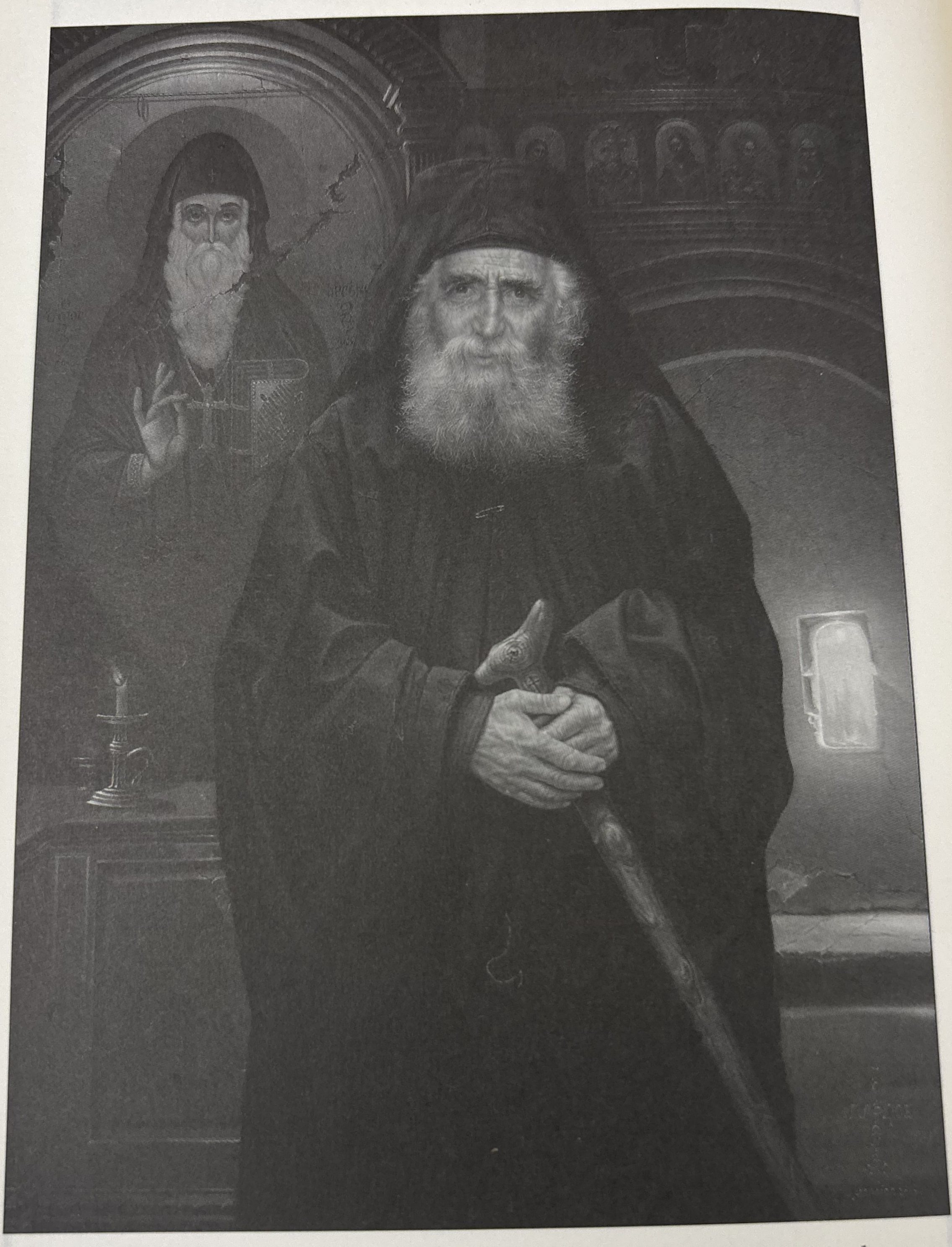


The icon of Christ painted by the sisters of the Monastery in Souroti, according to the instructions of Elder Paisios based upon his vision.

PART TWO

Themes

Virtues



A painting of Elder Paisios and Saint Arsenios in front of the altar of a small church. It is on display in the meeting hall of The Holy Monastery "Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian".

Oil on canvas (35.5'' x 49.20'') a painting by The Art of Astreos (Vareloglou Nikolaos).

Utter Estrangement from the World

When the elder left the world for the Holy Mountain, he cut off all contact with his relatives in order to become estranged from the world,[1] the first rung on the ladder of monastic virtues.

It was neither easy or nor painless for him to uproot himself from his parents and siblings, because he was very attached to them. He loved them so much that he had always been willing to make sacrifices for them. "In the beginning," he would say, "It's very painful for someone to leave his small family so that he can join the larger family of Adam, the family of God."

Because of his love for his relatives, distancing himself from them was at first a cause for suffering and even torment—when he first distanced himself from them. But he struggled with courage, and by the grace of God his mind and heart were detached from those close to him, becoming totally estranged from the world.

"When I first came to the monastery," he recalled, "I loved my brother very much and of course, my mother. I wasn't as attached to my other relatives. One day, I heard voices in the monastery courtyard. I looked, and it was my brother—he'd come to get me. I went to my cell, and I cried

1. In Greek, ξενιτεία - *xeniteia*.—Trans.

a lot. And that was it! It passed. I washed my face and came back out. It was all over."

The first time he returned to his hometown as a monk, which he did for health reasons, he didn't stay at his family home. Instead, in order to keep the promise he had given when he became a monk—to remain a stranger to the world—in the beginning, he would sleep in local chapels. Even later, when he stayed at the home of Katie Patera while he was undergoing therapy, he refused to eat food that he found out his mother had sent him. He loved her greatly, but he no longer called her "mother." On the other hand during his stay in the Patera home, he loved Katie's mother Helen , at whose home he would stay, as his spiritual mother, which is what he would call her. Once his sister Christina knitted some woolen socks for him, but when he found out that they were from her, he wouldn't wear them.

At Stomio, even though he was living his monastic life close to his family home, he never stayed there or in the homes of his siblings.[2] Once, an amazed acquaintance asked him why he never went back home. "I left my parents out of love for Christ," replied the elder, "and I made a promise, so I can't stay at my family's house anymore. For me, all the people in the world are my parents, my brothers and sisters, and my relatives." This was the ultimate goal of his estrangement from the world. He once remarked, character-

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2. There was one exception: once, he happened to meet Father Gerasimos Stogias, an older monk of Mount Athos, who had been a spiritual child of Hadji-George. Father Gerasimos was staying the night at the elder's family home, and he asked him again and again to stay there as well. So, for his sake, the elder gave way.

istically, "I haven't done anything. But, even though I used to have [just] seven siblings, God, Who is so good, has granted me to feel that everyone in the world is my brother."

Once, his younger brother, Luke, and an acquaintance visited the elder at the Iveron skete. They spoke for a little while, and afterward the two asked him to go along with them to venerate in the monastery church. The elder showed them the way and said, "There, that's where Iveron is—go on if you want." They left in tears. "They were reverent people," he commented later, "but they didn't understand monastic life."

Another time, at Panagouda, one of his older brothers and another man came to see him. Since they were tired, he came out and received them by the spigot. They talked, but he wouldn't take them into his cell or offer his hospitality for the night, and he wouldn't accept the gifts they had brought him. It didn't upset them, though, because they knew that was his custom.

He did once extend hospitality to a nephew of his who needed his spiritual help—but he would have done the same for a stranger in a similarly serious situation. When asked who the young man was, the elder smiled and said, "My nephew." And afterwards, softly, so his guest wouldn't hear him, he added, "A nephew! How do I have relatives? Do sailors have farms?"

Once, his youngest sister went to visit him at the women's monastery in Souroti. He let her wait for hours. Finally he received her, after everyone else who had come to see him, but only for a minute, and he remained standing the whole time. In fact, he scolded her for coming to see him. Even when he was ill shortly before his repose, when his siblings came to

visit him, he said, "Why did you come here? This is a monastery." He remained above the emotions and ties of family until the end. He was especially vigilant at the monastery, since he didn't want to give the slightest reason for the nuns to stumble.

The natural man, without the Spirit, who doesn't understand and can't accept "the things of the Spirit,"[3] might be shocked by this, not knowing that God and the demands of the Schema call for monastics to be as strangers to their blood relations. But this is not motivated by hatred or distaste. Rather, it is in emulation of the Lord, who became a stranger for our sakes, and so that the monk or nun will be able to love all people alike.

When the elder became a monk, he made a secret pact with God, that God would take care of his relatives from then on. If he had continued to be interested in them, to want to make efforts to help them, he would have made the agreement null. Instead, he gave them over to God once and for all, no longer concerning himself with them. His absolute trust that he was leaving his family in surer hands than his own was an unceasing, silent prayer for them. This is why, as he wrote in one of his letters, "As a monk, I never once prayed for my relatives according to the flesh." He only had their names written in the diptychs*, so that they would be commemorated at the proskomide*. "I did nothing," he once said. "I never helped them. As a monk, I could have met with them and the others from my village and given them some spiritual counsel, but I didn't." He no longer concerned himself with "our [family] and [their

3. 1 Cor. 2:14.

neighbors who were] not our [relatives]."

He never categorized people as "ours" and "not ours." He attained such a degree of estrangement from the world that he could say, "I have seven siblings, and I don't even know which are living and which have died."

"Yesterday morning," he once related, "someone came and told me that my sister Maria had fallen asleep in the Lord. 'Fine,' I said, 'I'll commemorate her.'[4] I had visitors the whole day. In the evening, while I was commemorating the names of the deceased, I overlooked my sister's name. 'I forgot a name,' I said to myself. 'Which one?' Later I remembered."

Early on in the elder's monastic life, estrangement from his relatives helped him. Later on, once he had come to think of all people in the same way, with dispassion, contact with them wouldn't have caused him any spiritual harm. He had acquired universality: he had become a "universal father." Still, discerningly, he kept to the same course he had before, so that his example wouldn't serve as an excuse for younger, spiritually weaker monastics.

His final visit to Konitsa, undertaken to gather information about the life of Saint Arsenios, was in 1971. He was invited by the local bishop and other clergy, but he never went. Only on rare occasions would he write letters to a relative

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4. In general, as noted, the elder did not pray for his relatives. When he was informed of a relative's passing, though, he would read "Blessed are the blameless in the way" one time. He would say one round of prayers on his prayer-rope, and then he would transfer the name in the diptychs* from the list of the living to that of the reposed. [The prayer "Blessed are the blameless in the way" is comprised of verses from Psalm 118 (119), which begins with these words. It is chanted at the beginning of the funeral service. —eds.]

concerning spiritual matters. The single letter he wrote to his mother as a monastic was the letter in which he said he was leaving her and would henceforth have as his mother the Theotokos.[5]

Even though his relatives didn't fully understand his behavior, they trusted him. They accepted everything he said without complaint, knowing how much he loved them and had done for them before renouncing the world. They believed that, being a monk, he acted as he did for spiritual reasons. God revealed matters to them, and they weren't troubled. (Moreover, they received their reward to a certain degree even in this life. In addition to the divine help they received, they benefited from the respect, honor, and help from others that they received as Father Paisios's family members.)

When monks asked the elder about relationships with relatives, he would say, "We shouldn't be attached [to them]. Those relationships are a human consolation, but as monks we should be looking for consolation from God. A monk who loves his parents a lot stays underdeveloped spiritually. The Lord doesn't give him the gift of feeling that everyone is his relative, so that he can love everyone the same. Besides, we promised to distance ourselves from our relatives for the love of Christ."

He didn't force others to act the same way. He would give them the chance to strengthen their own eager goodness by allowing them to act in accordance with their spiritual state. He was joyful when he saw monks who had acquired estrangement from the world, and he was saddened by the op-

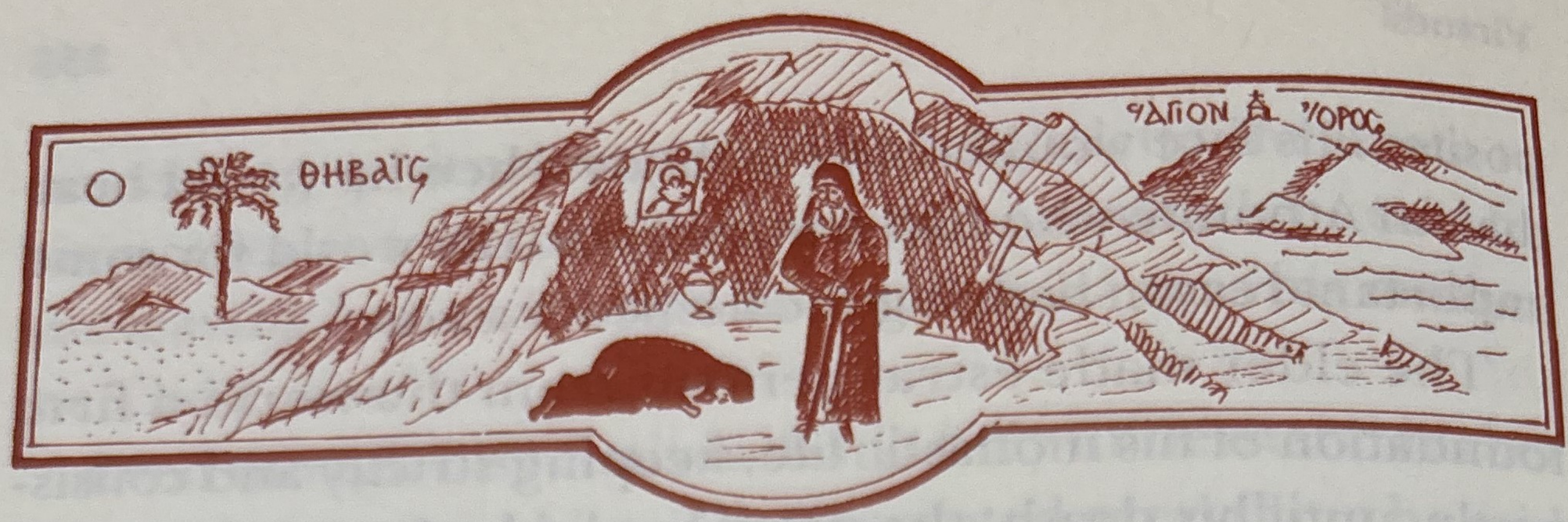
5. See p. 85 ("The Small Schema").

posite. His face would shine with joy when he would hear that an Athonite who had traveled into the world for some important reason hadn't gone home for a visit.

The elder made estrangement from the world a firm foundation of his monastic life, keeping strictly and consistently, until his death, the promises he had made when he received the Schema. In this way, he managed to love God wholeheartedly and to embrace each and every person as brother or sister, becoming a marvelous example of monastic perfection.

Saint John of the Ladder teaches that it is estrangement from the world that yields the wondrous acts of humility performed by the saints: "Such feats," he writes, "are the effect of flight from the world carried to the highest degree."[6]

6. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 25:46, p. 157.



Obedience

The elder did not spend many years in obedience at the coenobium. From the start, though, he learned and excelled in obedience, the most important subject. Firstly, he was, with a cheerful attitude, in perfect obedience to the abbot, who was also his elder. He obeyed all of the members of the Abbott's council in the same way, without making distinctions.

The elder underwent the most difficult trials in obedience when blindly obeying elder John, who, as was previously mentioned, assigned him difficult jobs and strictly censured him, without the abbot's knowledge. Father Paisios, as a good, obedient monk, endured all of this silently and with self-reproach. He never criticized elder John, not even in his thoughts, and he believed that everything that happened took place on account of his own sins. Finally, he started hemorrhaging and ended up in the monastery infirmary. While there, he gave thanks and prayed for elder John, because he had benefited him. "He beat me like an octopus," the elder recalled, "but he got the ink out of me."[7]

In fact, the Elder would be quite upset when he would

7. The traditional Greek method of removing the ink from and tenderizing a freshly-killed octopus is to beat it against a rock. – eds.

ask his superiors how he should do one or another job, and they would answer, "Do as God enlightens you," because he preferred to be given specific instructions in order to wholly cut off his will.

Elder Paisios lived the mystery of obedience. He learned its benefits from experience, and this is why he sought it. "You should know," he would say, "that the whole essence—the secret—of monastic life is in obedience: cutting off your will, even being obedient to someone younger if there's no danger of doing him harm. Then the grace of God comes. When I left the coenobium, I really felt a need to be obedient to someone. When I went to Stomio, since Father Seraphim was nine hours away by foot, I took a twelve-year-old boy born out of wedlock who everyone neglected, and I made him my elder.[8] I'd ask, 'What do you say, my boy, should I do this?' And I'd do whatever he'd tell me.

'What do you say? Should I go cut some wood?'

'You want to go cut wood?' he'd say. 'Are you crazy?'

"So I would cut off my will and do something else. If you only knew how much good it did me! Of course, people were at a loss because they respected me. 'How about that—obeying a child!'"

The boy took heart and developed confidence, and it helped him to become a good man. But I was helped even more by cutting off my own will. Cutting off the will helps in the spiritual life.

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8. The boy was a frequent visitor at the monastery. To speak of a child being born out of wedlock, in the language used here, implies abandonment: his father was certainly absent, and his mother, for whatever reason, also neglected his care. Modern social services did not exist in the village, and such children were at or near the bottom of the social order. —eds.

Naturally, after a certain amount of time, the elder achieved the true spirit of submission, and he no longer needed to perform monastic obedience in its initial form—that is in the form of blind obedience to an elder. In the words of Saint Theognostos, "He who has achieved inward self-renunciation and has subjected his flesh to the spirit no longer needs to submit himself to other men. Such a person obeys God's word and law like a grateful servant."[9] The elder had reached a higher state: he had placed his mindset in submission to the grace of God, guided by the Holy Spirit. "When the grace of the Spirit rules within [a man]," says Saint Peter of Damascus, "then he no longer has a will of his own, but whatever he does is according to God's will. Then he is at peace."[10]

He no longer had his own will, plans, or schedule. In a letter dated November 3, 1972, he wrote, "God sets my schedule—I don't. I don't make plans anymore [to go out into the world]. When there's a need, even if I don't want to go, I can't resist—God prods me with His love and with my love for my neighbor."

In addition to the elder's enlightened nous and discernment, in serious matters he would receive direct instruction from God, sometimes after prayer, and sometimes even when he wasn't expecting it. Nevertheless, because he was so humble, when a matter was purely personal, he wasn't comfortable following his own will. Instead, he would ask and obey other elders, spiritual fathers, bishops, and even his spiritual children.

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9. *Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 361.

10. *Ibid*, vol. 3, p. 84.

He would say, "However right my opinion about some personal matter might be, I can't trust it, because it's mine. When a doctor gets sick, he doesn't make a diagnosis by himself: he goes to another doctor, even one who's not as good a doctor as he is."

In the early years, after the elder first arrived at Panagouda, he heard many bitter comments made by monks bothered by all the visitors headed there, so he thought about moving to another hermitage. He went and asked a spiritual father, Father Nikodemos, who told him, "Don't leave unless the Holy Community tells you to." The elder obeyed and remained.

Sometimes he would be invited to Canada, and, just as Saint Anthony the Great asked his disciple if he should travel to Constantinople, the elder would ask his spiritual children if he should go. (In obedience to their opinion, he didn't.) Once, he thought about planting some grapevines in the yard in front of Panagouda, so that the pilgrims could sit in their shade. But when another father disagreed, he was obedient and didn't do so.

Whenever there was Divine Liturgy in his hermitage, he would ask the priest what he wanted to read while the proskomide was performed: the hours, a supplicatory service, the prayers before Holy Communion, or the Jesus prayer. "It's my habit," he'd say, "to obey whatever the priest wants."

If obedience is the cutting off of the will and is "entirely foreign... to one's own will,"[11] then the elder was truly obedient until the end of his life, first of all by scorning fleshly

11. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 4.107, p. 47.

comfort. "To cut off one's will while in the cell," writes Saint Barsanuphius, "Is to despise fleshly comfort in all things."[12] And when it came to people the elder was caring for, it got to the point where he couldn't plan his day anymore. Even if he were cold, hungry, or suffering from illness—the worst was the hemorrhaging at the end—or whatever bodily need he had to attend to, he endured patiently, and cut off not only his natural desires but even his most necessary earthly needs. He would think of ways of cutting off his will, and in this way he provided an example of obedience.

Despite all of this, some people would ask, "Who is Elder Paisios obedient to? We don't know who his elder is." For Elder Paisios, it was easy—a joy and a comfort—to live in obedience, but God had other work for him to do. He would say, "I can exercise blind obedience, but when I have certain responsibilities"—that is, his spiritual responsibilities as an Elder—"I have to take the initiative." When he was subject to others, he passed through the stages of obedience and never troubled his elders. He learned obedience, not from books, but practically. Because of this, he was able to understand and help others who were in obedience. Although he had been austere and resolute with himself, when later in his life he became an elder, he was lenient with others. He had great sensitivity, subtlety, and discernment.

He wanted obedience to stem from freedom and to take place with a cheerful disposition, so that it would be a submission to the mindset of the elder; rather than something formal and external like in the military. He considered obedience to be a therapy for every illness of the soul, especially

12. Bible, Saint Barsanuphius and Saint John, in Greek. Answer,124, p. 90.

pride. "Obedience," he would emphasize, "is the quickest and easiest way. It's the key to paradise. In obedience, the will is cut off as well as selfishness and the passions and when the grace of God comes, life becomes paradise."

"If someone is ill," taught the elder, "and is obedient to his doctor, he'll get better. If someone isn't very bright, but he's obedient, he'll become wise.[13] But if he's smart as a whip but disobedient, he'll be destroyed." The worst thing, he thought, is for someone to ignore the advice of the elders and do what his own thoughts tell him to do. "If someone listens to his own thoughts, he'll get hurt—he's lost, he's asking to be destroyed." When someone would ask him for counsel, not for the sake of obedience and spiritual benefit, but to extract a blessing to do his own will, the elder would stop the fruitless discussion and say, "Make a prostration to your thoughts, and do what you want." For his part, he would be relieved of responsibility. "Elders," he emphasized, "will be accountable to God according to the degree of obedience their disciples show them."

"Those in monastic obedience," he advised, "should obey their elder. If he's strict and unfair with them, they'll receive great grace. They shouldn't criticize him. If they find it hard to be obedient, they should tell him their thoughts and then do whatever he says. Those in obedience should be full of willingness and self-renunciation—the elder should just put on the brakes.

"An elder shouldn't go chopping away—he should prune, tactfully. He should have passed through obedience

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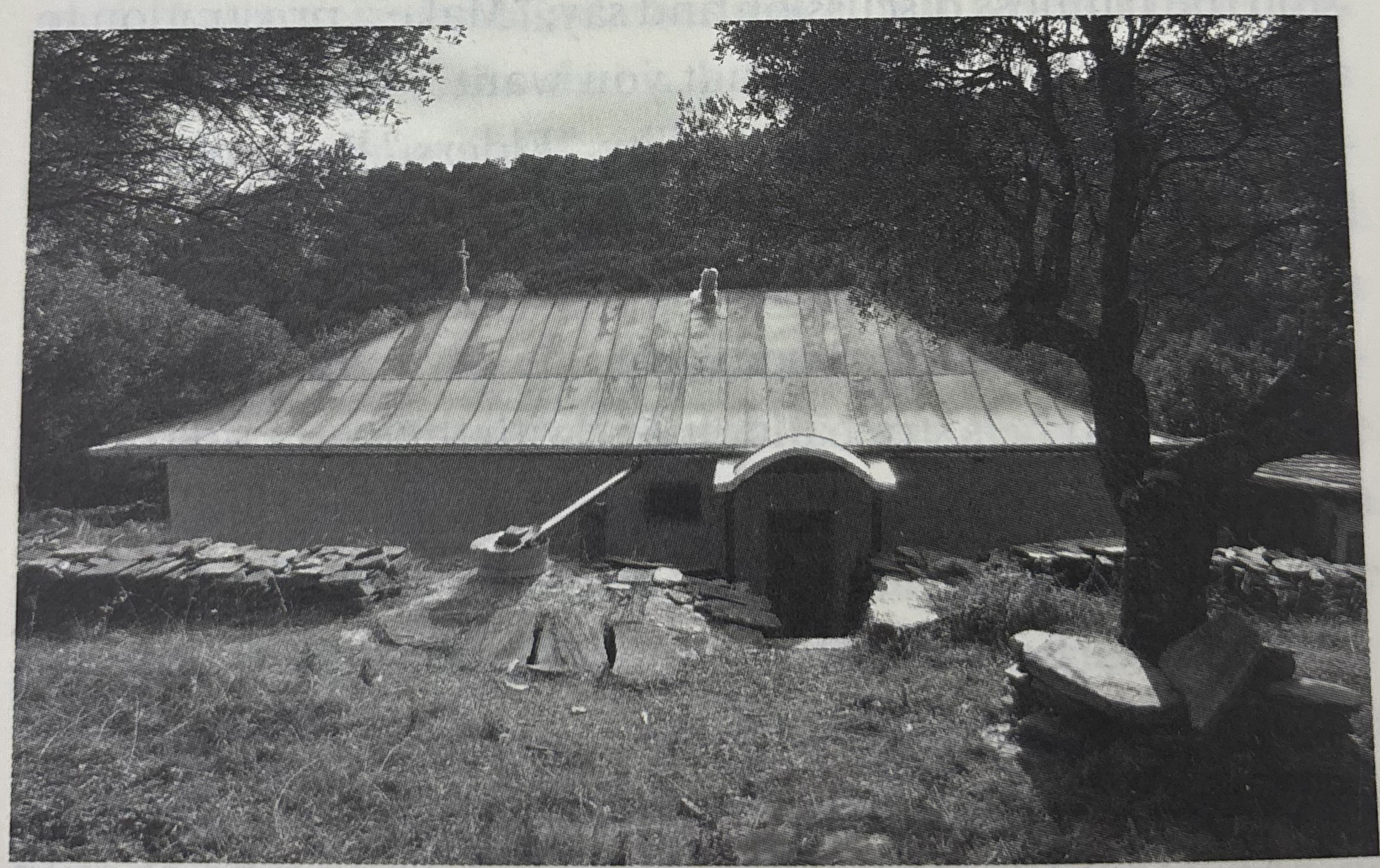
13. Literally, "a philosopher"; that is, through God's grace he becomes one wise in God.—Trans.

himself first, and he shouldn't conduct experiments on his disciples. Elders who demand blind obedience ought to have excellent vision."

The advice he gave was extremely practical, and it spoke to people from within because it was advice he had first applied to himself. He both practiced and taught obedience: he was a grace-filled disciple and, later, proved to be a discerning Elder. It was because of his obedience that Papa Tikhon referred to him as "my dear Paisios."



The entrance to the Hermitage of Holy Cross.

The "Wealth of Humility"

As salt flavors every food to which it's added to, so we encounter humble-mindedness in every aspect of the elder's life and in all the ways that he expressed himself in conversations, writings, and his relationships with others. His soul put on humility like a garment, the "raiment of the godhead."[14]

Instead of bringing him thoughts of pride, God's miracles and benefactions became an occasion for humility and increased spiritual struggle. What was distinctive about his humility was its nobility; he had a "wealth of humility."[15]

He considered himself lower than all of creation, worse than the animals. In one of his letters,[16] he writes, "We compare ourselves to the animals—actually, that's an insult to the poor animals. We're worse than they are. One day I was

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14. Saint Isaac the Syrian, *Homily* 77, pp. 381–382. ["For humility is the raiment of the Godhead. The Word Who became man clothed Himself in it, and therewith He spoke to us in our body. Every man who has been clothed with it has truly been made like unto Him Who came down from His own exaltedness, and hid the splendour of His majesty, and concealed His glory with humility, lest creation should be utterly consumed by the contemplation of Him."—eds.]

15. "The sorrowful humility of the mourning is one thing; the condemnation of conscience of those who are still living in sin is another; and the blessed wealth of humility, which the perfect attain by the action of God, is yet another" (*Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 5.29, p. 63).

16. Dated December 25, 1965.

trying to think of something to compare myself to, and I finally settled on a dung beetle. But, after I really thought about it, I realized I wasn't being fair to the poor thing. A dung beetle's purpose is to cut up manure, piece by piece, to make little lumps out of it and make it disappear. But I—a rational human being and creation in the image and likeness of God—I collect manure in the form of my sins and carry it to God's temple. And the worst part is that I'd never let anyone call me a dung beetle, or even a donkey—and everyone knows the hard, patient work donkeys do for people, and in the end everyone forgets about them.

He lived the mystery of humility deeply, and his mind gave birth to humble thoughts and ideas. He would call himself "measly," "bratty," "a country bumpkin," "a loser," "a fake," "illiterate," "small-brained," and so on.

He protected himself with humility. He knew that, while "arrogance brings destruction and great disorder,"[17] humility is a divine magnet that attracts all the gifts and blessings of God. And so he loved humility from the bottom of his heart, and he liked to use the word with everyday expressions: he would speak of a "humble little stool" or say that "he humbled the lamp" [by turning it off], or, if a tree needed pruning, he'd say, "that tree needs to be humbled."

If he made mistakes in judgment, he had the humility to admit them, and if he was critical of others he had the humility to ask forgiveness. He knew his limitations and didn't think that he knew the answer to everything. When he was asked about ecclesiastical, canonical, or scholarly matters, or any matter requiring specialized knowledge, he

17. Tob. 4:13.

would send his questioner to the appropriate people for advice.

He avoided honors, distinctions, offices, and publicity like a bee fleeing from smoke. His true, deep humility was obvious from the spontaneous and unprompted comments he would sometimes make. Once, when he was a soldier, he was awarded a medal for bravery, but someone else went and received it in his place. "That was good," he told the man. "What would I do with it?" When he met up with his friend and fellow soldier Pantelis Tzekos in Corfu, his friend introduced him to his mother as "the man who saved me." The elder, leaping up, cried out sharply, "No! It wasn't me—the Lord saved you."

To hide himself from his grateful friend, the elder never told him his monastic name. Much later, when Pantelis's son Philip visited Mount Athos, the elder realized who he was. But, though he sent blessings to Pantelis, he didn't reveal his true identity. Philip would speak of Father Paisios's kindness, while his father was looking for a man called Arsenios Eznepides. He searched for him for thirty-five years, and it was only after the elder's death that Pantelis learned that Arsenios Eznepides and Elder Paisios were the same person. "I'd have told the whole world that he was my savior," he remarked later, "and I'd have gone to live near him."

The elder's humble mindset was revealed in various ways. At vigils he preferred to stand in the very back of the church. During services, he would avoid reading the Gerontika,[18] even though many of the fathers present might be his disci-

18. Psalms, readings, and hymns that according to the typicon are to be read by the elder (or someone he has appointed in his stead). —Trans.

ples, and young enough to be his children or grandchildren. Typically, despite his senior rank, he would be only the second to receive Holy Communion, putting someone younger first, especially if a child were present. He felt as though he were the last of all.

So he wouldn't forget who he was, he wrote in pencil on the wall of his cell at Holy Cross the following verse from the Psalter: "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill."[19]

He once visited a women's monastery. The abbess was filled with joy, and she called the entire sisterhood together to ring the monastery bells and give him a formal reception. The elder, uncomfortable, addressed her rather sharply. "What's all this, Mother? You ought to be hitting tin cans." (Tin cans, in years gone by, were what people would hit when they wanted someone to leave.)

He would scold and become severe with people who wanted to take his picture or make recordings of him, or who would speak about him, and he'd become quite stern with them. When someone would show the elder a photograph of him, he'd ask for it as though he wanted to see it, and then he'd tear it up. If anyone secretly made tapes of him speaking, he'd take them and burn them in the stove. To a visitor who wanted a blessing to write an article about him, he said, "What's that, some kind of joke? If you want us to have a nice day together, just don't bother yourself about me or write anything about me." When he learned that a monk whom he frequently helped was talking about him, he disciplined him by ordering him not to visit him for three

19. Ps. 112:7 (113:7).

years. At Souroti, someone called the elder a saint, and he started crying.

But what could he do? As much as he tried, he couldn't manage to live his life in obscurity. God wanted to glorify him even in this life. This is a spiritual law. If you chase your shadow, it runs from you, but if you run away from it, it chases you; and so it is with glory. This is what happened in the life of the elder.

When Patriarch Demetrios (1972-1991) visited Mount Athos, the elder went to get his blessing. "Your All-Holiness," someone said, "Father Paisios is here." The humble patriarch rose from his throne in order to greet him. The elder made a prostration to the floor and stayed there with his forehead to the ground until a bishop came and raised him up.

At that time, the president of Greece was visiting the church of the Protaton on the Holy Mountain. The head of the president's police detail, Constantine Papoutsis, recalls the event:

I had heard of Elder Paisios. I imagined him to be tall and dignified and expected to see him there in a place of honor. They pointed him out to me. He was standing in the back, hiding hunched over in a corner. He was a little old man, small in stature, but there was something of the divine about him that drew you toward him. One of the police officers recognized him. "There's Father Paisios," he said to the others, and the entire unit instantly raced over to the elder. I was the only one left with the president.

I was in shock. I went to call them back, but in vain. Finally, I followed the dictates of my heart rather than my reason, and, not thinking, I rushed over to the elder too. Thank

God nothing happened. The elder couldn't avoid the "police assault," and he was tapping us gently on the heads, [blessing us,] saying, "Go on back to your work." Inside of us a change had taken place—a joy we never experienced before had flooded into us.

When the elder was once asked if he became prideful after receiving so much honor, he replied, "How can I be prideful when I know who I am? And when I think of the gallons of blood that Christ shed for me, I almost lose my mind."

Regarding the crowds of people who would come to see him, he believed, "I'm a squash, and these people come, thirsty, desperate for some refreshment, because they think they'll find a watermelon." He regretted that he had become widely known. He confidentially told someone, "My greatest enemy is my name. It's my friends and the people I know who've hurt me the most, not my enemies. If I'd known from the start how my life would go, I'd have gone to Jerusalem and become a monk secretly. I'd have worn a black coat and a cap and let my hair and beard grow long. I'd go around without making a fuss, and no one would know I was a monk."

"One time," the elder related, "I agreed to let someone pick me up from Thessaloniki. While I waited there for him to come in his car, a river of people was passing by, and no one turned to look at me. 'Well,' I said to myself, 'this is great! I've finally found a place where no one pays any attention to me.'"

He put no stock in praise, nor did he succumb to the false

20. "The man who is justly praised is not harmed thereby, but if praise seems

glory of men, so he was never harmed by it.[20] He would say, "I've blasphemed the name of God with the things I do; but they were not premeditated, so I believe Christ will have mercy on me."

He rejoiced in seeing others advance in position, becoming priests, spiritual fathers, abbots, bishops, and so on. He would help and encourage them when he knew them to be worthy. There wasn't a trace of jealousy or envy, or any sort of inferiority complex in his heart. He wanted to think of everyone as being above him, and he helped younger monks make progress. "Let me turn into compost," he would pray, "so younger monks can take root, grow, and bear fruit."

He was always the first to greet others, and to bow and kiss priests' hands, even if they were younger than he. Before abbots and bishops, he would usually make a full prostration. He himself avoided letting people kiss his hand. A surgeon who operated on the elder said, "My big complaint is that he wouldn't let me kiss his hand—meanwhile, he was embracing me."

People who spoke with the elder didn't feel that there was any difference between him and them. He wouldn't let anyone feel like his inferior, because he didn't feel that he was someone important—he saw everyone else as better than himself.

The sincerity of his humility was tested by people's dirty tricks, slander, injustice and disparaging words. In particular, the elder suffered a great deal from one monk, who hurled baseless accusations against him. He never gave a

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sweet to him, he labors without recompense" (Saint Isaac the Syrian, *Homily* 15, p. 84).

contrary account and never defended himself, but only prayed for the brother's repentance with pain of soul. When he learned that the monk had published a book full of abusive language about him, he said, "It's a good book, not like that other one"—referring to a book that sang his praises. An abbot who read the accusations said that they were badges of honor for the elder.

"Blessed are those," he wrote, "who rejoice when unjustly accused, rather than when they are justly praised for their virtuous life. Here are the signs of holiness..."[21] And so he would rejoice when he heard accusations against himself, and he once said to someone, "Go ahead and bad-mouth me. Would you, please?"

There was a monk who, when he encountered visitors on the road, would say, "Why are you going to that Paisios guy?" And he would reel off a string of accusations. The elder heard about it, but he wasn't concerned, and he asked for no explanations. He preferred talk like that to praise. "The perfection of humility," writes Abba Isaac, "is to bear false accusations with joy."[22] In fact, the elder would send his accuser gifts as blessings. But, though he accepted slander against him passively, he would not tolerate hypocrisy—just as the Lord scourged the hypocrisy of the Pharisees by saying, "Woe unto you," which is something He never said to other sinners. Once, the elder met his accuser on the road. With false reverence, the man went to make a bow before him, addressing him as "holy Elder." "Next time," replied Father Paisios, "be more sincere."

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21. *Epistles*, p. 226–227.
22. *Homily* 6, p. 55.

Regarding humility, he taught, "It's not enough for us just to push away thoughts of pride. We should also think about the sacrifices and generosity of God and our ingratitude. Then our hearts will breakbe broken, even if they're made of granite. When someone really knows himself, humility comes upon him. God comes and lives in him, and the Jesus prayer is said on its own." Self-knowledge leads a man to humility; and, in the words of Abba Isaac, knowledge of his own weakness "becomes to him the foundation, the root, and the beginning of all goodness."[23]

"A humble man," he believed, "is worth more than the whole world. He's stronger than anything. To have strength in prayer and the spiritual struggle, a monk has to have humility, which conceals divine power. When he's proud, he gets weak, spiritually and physically. When he struggles in humility, he's got strength, even if he doesn't accomplish much."

Wanting to demonstrate the results of humility, the elder would tell an anecdote. "Once, a little cat was sick. The poor thing would try to throw up, but it was having a tough time of it—it just couldn't. I felt sorry for it, the way it was suffering. So I made the sign of the Cross over it, but nothing happened! 'You're pitiful,' I said to myself. 'You can't even help a little cat.' When I was humbled like that, the cat got better right away."

"Today," he once remarked, "no one wants stock in humility." That is, people don't recognize what it's worth and the power it has, so they don't try to acquire it. And yet it is so necessary,[24] that it can raise us up to heaven, and that's why

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23. *Ibid* 8, p. 67.

24. "If God who by nature saves, desires that we not be saved until we are hum-

it's said that it lifts us up. "No one," the elder taught, "can go to heaven by moving up in the world—only by making a spiritual descent [into humility]. Everyone who humbles himself and is careful will be saved. A monk is obliged to be in a humble state, and that's especially crucial at the last moment of his life."

One time, a young man who had a great love for the monastic life told the elder that, when he prayed, he asked only for humility. Overjoyed, the elder flew out of his seat. "My child," he said, with radiant countenance, "that means you're asking for divine grace." This is how much he valued humility.

He wanted humility to accompany him even after his repose. As he confidentially told someone before his death: "When I die, throw me into a gully at Saint Paraskevi,[25] so the dogs can eat me." Earlier, he had said, "I pray that my bones turn black, so people will say, 'Eh, that was Paisios. Anyway...' That way, people won't honor me."

To avoid being honored at his funeral and afterward, the elder wanted to die on the Holy Mountain and to be buried there discreetly, unseen. But when he learned that God's will was otherwise, he obeyed humbly, and cut off this, his final desire. He only asked that no one be invited to his funeral.

Among monks, there are certain blessed elders who are at the highest level of virtue but don't know it. They're so sim-

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bled, how can man who by nature is saved either be saved or save if he is not humbled?" (Saint Maximos the Confessor, PG 90, 160C).

25. That is, a village next to the Monastery of Saint John in Souroti.—eds.

ple that they remain unsuspecting of their own spiritual wealth. One father, for example, saw the Uncreated Light and didn't know what it was: he thought that all monks were illuminated at night by a light that went on and off by itself.

Elder Paisios was not in this category. He had blessed simplicity and a life of holiness, he would see the Uncreated Light, and he was accounted worthy of exalted spiritual states; but he also had spiritual knowledge. He knew very well that which he experienced were divine occurrences and rare moments of grace. But he knew even better that all this was God's doing, that his own efforts resulted only in sins. He was fully aware that these experiences were a mercy of God upon him, and so he would say, "I'm a tin can shining in the sun—it looks like gold, but it's empty. I've never gone to a café, even when I was a layman; but if the grace of God abandoned me, I'd become the worst bum in the world, wandering around Omonia Square."[26]

He took no account of his tremendous asceticism, because he did everything out of love for Christ, and not for the sake of being rewarded. He felt himself to be the recipient of God's mercy and indebted to Him. He would sigh sometimes, being pained because he had done nothing. "I met saints," he would say, "and I should have done many things." He felt that he never lived up to what he had been given, and that he never managed to offer what he should have to God.

Many people honored the elder as a saint. A few were critical of him and accused him of being a sorcerer. He would

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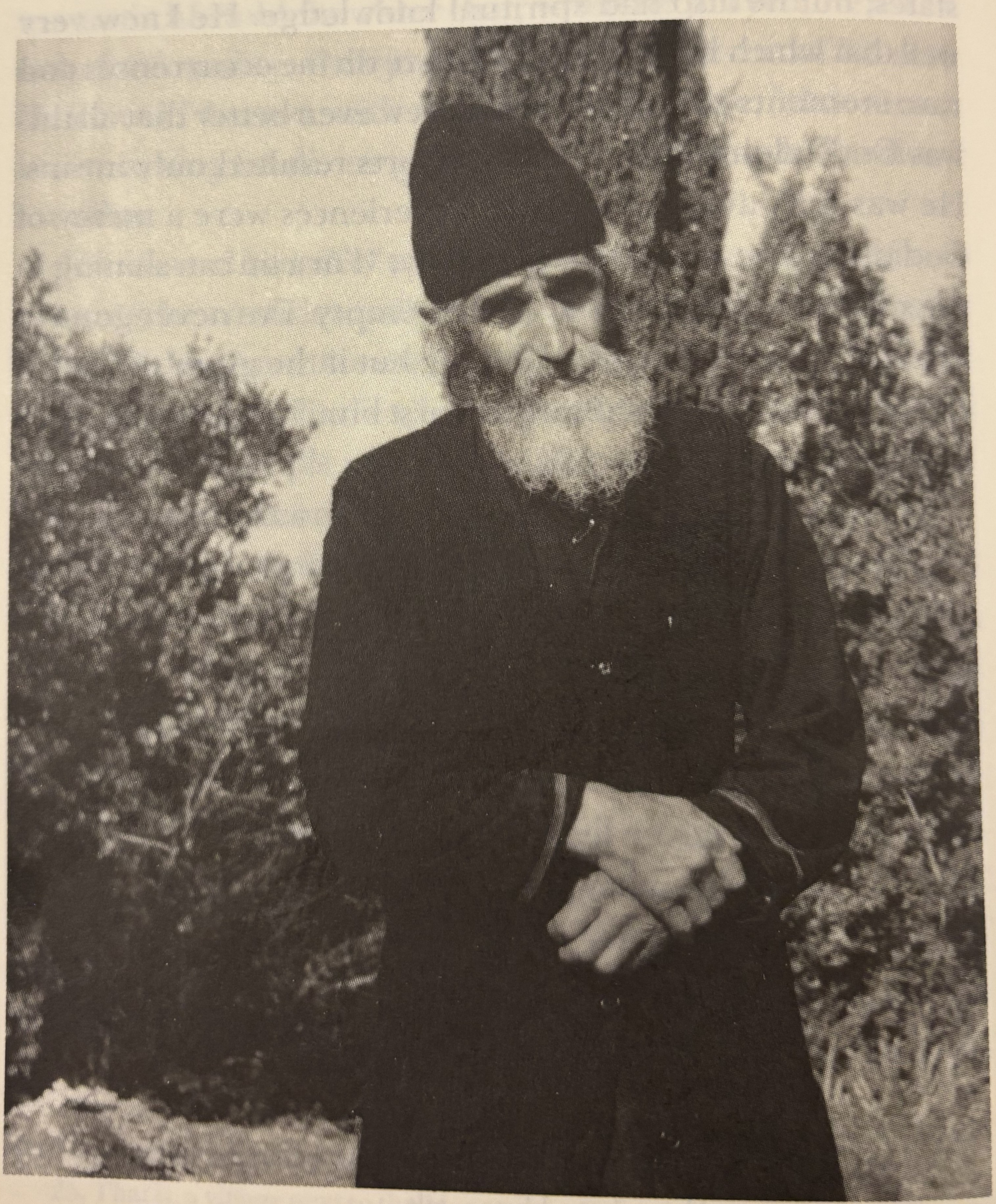
26. Omonia Square, in Athens, was infamous for being inhabited by prostitutes, drug-dealers, and homeless addicts.—eds.

answer them with his full self-assessment. "I'm not a saint or a sorcerer. I'm a sinful human being who tries to struggle. I look at myself as a speck of dust in the universe. I wish it were at least a clean speck!"

Such a man was he. A great man, deep in the abyss of his "wealth of humility," and fully aware both of the divine gifts he had been given and of his unworthiness.



Elder Paisios in the backyard of the Panagouda cell.

Worker and Preacher of Repentance

After returning to Athos from a trip, the elder commented, "Committing sin is in style these days. Not even one tenth of the people I saw go to confession. I need to confess every day, and they can't find any sins!"

The elder moved in another spiritual world. He judged his own deeds differently than he judged those of others. For everyone else, he would always find extenuating circumstances, but when it came to himself he was quite strict. "It's evidence that a person's spiritual life is genuine," he taught, "If he's very strict with himself and very lenient with other people. He doesn't use the canons like cannons." His spiritual labors were exacting, and he repented, confessed, and—voluntarily, with eager goodness—kept ascetic practices and rules in emulation of the saints. "When the saints said they were sinners," he once remarked, "they meant it. Their spiritual eyes had turned into microscopes, and they saw even their tiniest errors as great ones."

Someone who heard the elder speaking of himself might have gotten the impression that he was a great sinner. His repentance was intense, but so was his inner consolation and joy that were overflowing.

Being enflamed with repentance, he also felt the need for

frequent confession. During one period of his life, in addition to his other ascetical practices, he would pray seventy-seven rounds of a three-hundred–knot prayer-rope, making the sign of the Cross with each prayer. Symbolically, he was asking God for forgiveness seventy times seven.[27] He believed that he was a great sinner, and he earnestly beseeched from God mercy and forgiveness of his sins.

To cultivate repentance, he frequently read the Great Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete, which he ended up learning by heart. He also held the Prayer of Manasseh, from Great Compline, in high regard, and he found that it helped him to repent. When he would read it, with a contrite heart and broken spirit, he would flatten himself out on the ground.

The elder considered contrition and repentance to be a monk's chief work. The following passage from Abba Isaac, which was written in pencil on the wall of the elder's small hermitage at the Skete of Iveron, reveals the importance he placed on this: "What meditation can a monk have in his cell save weeping? Could he have any time free from weeping?"[28]

When the Divine Liturgy was celebrated in his hermitage, before taking Communion, he would kneel and ask the priest to read the prayer of forgiveness over him.[29] He would stay with his forehead on the ground, making deep and heartfelt sighs. In the place of the communion hymn, he

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27. See Matt. 18:21–22: "Then Peter came to him, and said, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I say not unto thee, until seven times: but, until seventy times seven.'" – eds.

28. *Homily* 37, p. 177.

29. In most coenobitic monasteries on the Holy Mountain and elsewhere in Greece, the monks confess their thoughts and sins to their elder throughout the

would sometimes chant the hymn "All those who in faith flee unto thee," from the Small Canon to the Theotokos. His voice would tremble from a contrition that proceeded from his deepest being, as if his heart itself were being pulled out. Reaching the words "no one else have we who sin as a perpetual intercession with our God," he would break out into sobs, no longer able to contain himself. He would try in vain to hide his contrition, by pretending to be wiping his nose as he exited the chapel.

Once, a clergyman on a pilgrimage was present at a vigil service at the Monastery of Stavronikita. He was impressed by a monk in the stall next to his, who wept unceasingly during entire service. The monk unsuccessfully tried to avoid being noticed. The clergyman asked someone to find out who he was, and he learned that it was Father Paisios.

Regarding tears, the elder would say, "There are many kinds of tears. Tears of repentance are sure, because they wash away sins and they're a spiritual reward, but they are physically exhausting. There are also silent tears, which are not visible. And many times a deep sigh is better than a cup or even a bucket of tears."

Once, an elderly monk from the desert visited him. He had come to find out if there was any truth to the rumors circulating about the elder, and he tried to determine the elder's spiritual state by asking various questions. "For three

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week, and it is just before they are to commune that the abbot reads over them the prayer of forgiveness that normally concludes the Mystery of Confession. Elder Paisios did not of course live in a coenobium any longer; and, as we have seen, when he felt the need he confessed to a visiting hieromonk. His request, which was therefore uncommon, expressed his overflowing humility and his continual longing to live reconciled with God. —eds.

hours," recalled the elder, "he taught me theory. He'd read about noetic prayer—if there was a book about it, he'd read it. He was saying, 'And in this spiritual state, this takes place; and in that state, that takes place; so which state are you in?'

"'In what state?' I repeated. 'In no state.'

"'So what are you doing out here?' he asked.

"'What am I doing? I ask God for self-knowledge. If I know myself, I'll have repentance. And if repentance comes, so will humility, and then, afterwards, grace. That's why I'm seeking repentance, repentance, and repentance. God will send His grace afterward.'"

The elder's holy life silently pointed the way to the Lord, and with his words he preached repentance to all. "No one," he taught, "should ask God for lights, or spiritual gifts, or for anything except repentance, repentance, repentance." A slight example of his tremendous repentance was the cloak of sackcloth he would put over his shoulders when he prayed in his cell—in sackcloth and ashes, like the prophets and Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian.

Scores of people would come to him, open their hearts to him, and ask for help. The elder would explain that he wasn't a spiritual father. "Go to a spiritual father and confess," he would say. Once, someone replied, "Elder, don't show a hungry man the road—he knows the road. A hungry man needs some food."

The elder would receive those who came to him, but he would explain to them that discussion and advice are one thing, and the Mystery of Confession another. He emphasized the absolute necessity of going to a spiritual father in order to confess and for the prayer of forgiveness to be read. This was for the salvation of their souls, and he often made

sacramental confession a precondition for speaking with him. "The mind is clouded before Confession," he would say, "and we won't be able to understand each other."

Once, a man with a serious problem came to the elder to implore him to pray on his behalf. The elder recommended that he go to confession. Somewhat disappointed, he objected: he had come to a holy man for assistance, and here all the elder was doing was telling him about confession. Replied the elder, "This is the only thing that'll help you—confession."

He had compassion on people who would not repent, and he prayed for them. He tried to bring those uninterested in the spiritual life to an understanding and a feeling of the need for Confession. Once, he wouldn't open his door to a man who was visiting him for the first time. He addressed the man from inside his cell, calling him by name, telling him to go confess first and then return, because he discerned that the man hadn't yet done so. When the pilgrim came back, the elder opened his door with a smile. "Now that you're well," he said, "come in so we can talk about it." And then he revealed that, even though he hadn't been told, he already knew what the man had come to discuss.

When he saw someone repent and change his way of life, his joy was obvious. He suffered along with the repentant person and strengthened him. He was a trainer of repenting Christians. Faint-hearted people who were depressed about their falls into sin concerned him too. "But there's repentance," he'd say. "Are your sins greater than God's mercy?"

"I'm not interested in how sinful someone is," he would add. "What I'm concerned about is whether he knows himself. God will judge each person according to the work

they've done on the old man. When the soul cuts away its faults, [whatever they are,] it will be beautiful to Christ."

Once, a monk that he knew set aside the Schema and returned to the world as a layman. The elder sent a message to him, proposing that he come and stay with him at the hermitage as his disciple. It was well-known that the elder would keep no one with him at the hermitage, but he would have gladly made the sacrifice in order to save a soul. In fact, he went to the army barracks where the man was and spoke to him about repentance.

Once a pilgrim came to him and asked him about "the mysteries of spiritual and heavenly things."[30] The elder emphasized repentance and humility. Again, the man tried to get him to speak about spiritual states and gifts, but the elder brought the conversation back around to repentance. The pilgrim became almost despondent, since he had heard so much about the holiness and charismatic gifts of the elder, and yet he would talk to him only about repentance.

If an ill person asked the elder to pray for his health, the elder would recommend confession and Holy Communion. He would say the same to students seeking to do well in their studies. When couples were having problems, he would recommend that they find a spiritual father, receive Communion, and live spiritually. Regarding people who were suffering from spells, he would say, "If they're confessing and com-

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30. Saint John Cassian, *Conferences* 14.3 (NPNF2, vol. 11, p. 435). ["For in what way will one, who has neither succeeded in understanding the nature of his own faults, nor tried to eradicate them, be able to gain an understanding of virtues, which is the second stage of practical training, or the mysteries of spiritual and heavenly things, which exist in the higher stage of theoretical knowledge?" – eds.]

muning, it doesn't matter if people are burying them in spells—they've got nothing to fear. The spells can't affect them." At feasts, when the elder would take the little refreshment that was offered after the service, along with the special wishes for the feast, he would always also say, "Good repentance." He would prescribe repentance as a general and powerful medicine for all conditions. Repentance was at the core of all his preaching.

"People have lost the feeling that they need to repent," he said, and it grieved him.

They commit sin and their conscience doesn't bother them. There's never-ending work to be done on ourselves. Repentance never ends, just like a wood carving someone can work on his whole life, with a magnifying glass. If a person doesn't start working on himself, the devil will find work for him to do, and he'll concern himself with other people's lives. We have to acquire spiritual sensitivity. A Christian has to be able to see the passions that he has inside him, to repent for them and not to forget about them. The Europeans put a lid on their conscience, and they end up in a state where they've got nothing and they're never happy. When something happens, we don't need to beat ourselves up over it—but let's deal with it. When I'd see one of my sins, I'd be happy, because a wound had been revealed so I could treat it.

Someone breaks a glass, and he laughs it off. It's not so much that he broke the glass as it is that he doesn't face up to it. As long as he's laughing about it, he's not facing his mistake, and he'll break another one. We have to grieve for our sins according to their magnitude, otherwise we'll fall into them again."

From his own experience, he taught that "the spiritual life is governed by spiritual laws. If we sincerely repent of an error we've made, we won't have to pay for it with an illness. God allows illnesses and injustices for the mistakes we've made that we're not aware of."

He encouraged everyone to repent, to, as he put it, "avoid war, because we provoke it with our sins. The world's gone bad, and that's why it'll be destroyed [if it doesn't repent]. It's like a sack with a hole in it that you can't mend. Maybe God can make a little bag out of a sack like that." Speaking to a monk, he said, "We're responsible for whatever happens, understand? Anyone who tries to become better influences everyone around him, and the whole world too.[31] If I were a saint, I could help a lot of people with my prayers."

In particular, he taught that monks are dressed in repentance. The entire life of a monk is repentance. The elder clothed himself in this saving garment, and he was shown by God to be a great worker and preacher of repentance.

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31. As Elder Sophrony of Essex notes in his biography of Saint Silouan the Athonite, "The ontological unity of humanity is such that every separate individual overcoming evil in himself inflicts such a defeat on cosmic evil that its consequences have a beneficial effect on the destinies of the whole world" p. 222. – eds.

Non-possessiveness

With amazing consistency, the elder maintained the vow of non-possessiveness he made to the Lord on the day of his tonsure.

At Esphigmenou Monastery, he had three cassocks hanging in his cell. He thought of one as being for services in the main Church, another for work, and the last for his cell. Later, though, he was critical of himself: "Well! You've justified that nicely." So he gave away two of them. When he left the monastery he took nothing with him. He didn't even have a bag. He took the little carpet on which he made his prostrations and washed it, and then he sewed it into a little case to store his outer cassock.

At Stomio, he had only one cassock and one coat. When he would wash it, he would wear his outer cassock until it dried. "There shouldn't be a second one," he'd say.

At Sinai, his poverty reached its apex: in his ascetic cell, he had nothing that belongs to this life.

At Holy Cross hermitage, a small trunk served as his whole storage area. He kept it at the end of the hall between his cell and the chapel, and he used it as a seat, a table, and a place to store necessary food: bread-rusks, a little rice, olives, and a jar of honey. But, even in spite of his poverty, whenever he would host someone, his hospitality was as noble and

rich as the disposition of his soul.

When Saint Arsenios appeared to him, the Saint told him, "What makes me love you even more is that you don't accept people's checks. I've watched you even at the post office." The elder had given instructions for checks to be returned to their senders. He kept only the names, so he could commemorate them, and occasionally the addresses, so that he could send them some blessing. He would warn them, though, that if they sent another check or a package, he would stop commemorating them. He'd send packages back as well, but, seeing the extra work this made for the post office employees, he began to accept the packages so as not to burden them. Despite his fatigue from his other duties, he would carefully divide the items in order to distribute them to monks in need. He would either put them in his sack and deliver them himself, or ask other fathers to do it. In this way he maintained his poverty, "poor, yet making many rich."[32]

Anything that, by his own austere standards, wasn't absolutely necessary to him, upset the elder, who thought of it as a burden or as something to be relieved of. "When I have things," he would say, "I feel like I'm wearing a shirt that's too tight."

The gifts presented to him by pilgrims who wanted to support him made it difficult for him to keep his vow of poverty. Being sensitive, the elder struggled on two fronts. On the one hand, he had to refuse gifts he was offered without disappointing or hurting the giver. On the other hand, there were times when he simply had to accept gifts so as not to upset people, and then he had to settle on the right way to

32. 2 Cor. 6:10.

donate to others what he had been given. The mother of a sick child once sent the elder a thousand drachmas. The elder, was so deeply disturbed that he wrote a letter to a common acquaintance of theirs.[33]

So you'll understand me better, I'll give you an example. I knock on Christ's door through prayer, and then people send me money, and it's like getting hit in the head with a rock. It makes me dizzy, and I have to stop my prayer until I can take care of it—and all the ways of doing that are spiritually harmful. Honestly, I haven't been able to concentrate since yesterday evening: I had to take care of this. These poor people did this out of their great love, and I'll thank them, but I'm asking for your help again. I started going through all the orphanages in Greece in my head, one by one, and then I thought about Kenya and the suffering black Orthodox children in orphanages there, and now I'm back to the suffering children here who are looking for help...

If someone left him money without his realizing it, he would put it in books and give them to the poor students at the Athonite School. If he could figure out who had left it, he would send the person blessings such as small icons and other items, that were more valuable than the money he'd been left. His principle was to give more than he received.

Once, at Katounakia, someone came to visit him. The elder cooked for him and hosted him for the night. He asked to buy some small icons from the elder, but the elder replied, "I can't do that." So, without the elder's realizing it, the man left behind two hundred drachmas along with his address. In a little while, he received fifty small icons, worth far more

33. Dated March 4, 1971.

than the two hundred drachmas.

He only rarely sold his handicrafts. Usually, he gave them away as blessings. He had perfect trust in the providence of God, and so he was never concerned about himself or kept any money for his needs. God took care of his necessities.

He would not accept money even from those for whom he prayed. "If I happen to need money," he wrote, "when one of you has written asking me to pray about something serious, I want you to know that I'd rather borrow money from others and pay it off little by little by selling my handicrafts, than write for you to send me some."

He tried to distribute any money he did happen to have. Once he had five hundred drachmas, and he offered it to a student. Knowing how poor the elder was, the student was reluctant to accept it, and he tried to excuse himself by saying that he had enough money. "Millions, right?" asked the elder jokingly, and he persuaded the young man to accept it.

When he left Papa-Tikhon's hermitage, he could load all his property onto two animals, including the press he used for his handicrafts and his twelve-volume Menaion. He had very few personal possessions: he could put his entire estate in a sack and carry it over his shoulder. At the time of his relocation, he had only two hundred and fifty drachmas, which he used as a down-payment for an iron window he'd ordered for the chapel at Panagouda.

When he wanted to go into the world, sometimes he wouldn't have enough money for tickets. He was forced to borrow on many occasions. In later years, he had a hard time scraping together enough money to buy wood for the winter, which he needed since he couldn't manage to cut enough by himself. When people he knew would offer to

pay, he would refuse, asking them to help needy elders instead.

His cassocks were worn-out and old, though clean. Once when he was in the world, an acquaintance of his had a new cassock made for him, thinking that he wore worn-out clothing because of economic hardship, but the elder didn't keep it. Afterward, he made a new cassock himself and was at peace.

The elder stayed as impoverished as an anchorite, even though he lived in a hermitage and spent time with many people. He kept some small items around for his visitors: he was among those who had their possessions "as though they possessed not."[34]

One day an old monk, elder Vincent, visited Father Paisios. Wearing a knit monastic hat and a waist-length coat, he looked like something in between a monk and a layman, and he had something mysterious about him. Elder Vincent would travel among the monastic dependencies and cells of Karyes with a bag on his back, collecting whatever the monks there would give him. Later, secretly, he would use it to aid the poor and the sick.

And so this mysterious elder Vincent came to Panagouda, lay down in the yard, and began to ask Elder Paisios if he had one or another item. The elder would answer that he did, and would give it to him. And so the God-sent elder filled his sack with blessings and left, having tested and, one might say, weighed Elder Paisios's love, which he found true and pure.

"It made an impression on me," the elder recalled,

34. 1 Cor. 7:30.

"because the things he asked for were necessities to me. He asked for five hundred drachmas and I gave him thirteen hundred; he asked for a magnifying glass with a handle, a raincoat, food, heating oil, and so on. Either he's at a high [spiritual] state or God enlightens him so that we can see ourselves, so that we can see whether or not we're attached to something material—even something that's a necessity."

"When someone asks us for something," the elder would say, "and we're sad when we give it to them, or if we get sad when we lose something, that means we love it more than we love Christ. It's a good sign if someone's joyful when he gives and sorry when he takes. If someone came into my cell and took everything I have, it wouldn't bother me. But if I saw someone cursing Christ or the Panagia, or tearing down a shrine, then I'd sacrifice myself to defend what's sacred."

When he left Mount Athos for the last time, he had only his outer cassock and a few blessings in a small sack. When he realized that he would never be returning, he sent for the angelic Schema and monastic veil.[35] He didn't have material goods, money, or valuable heirlooms, and he never cared to.

Worldly people cannot understand the virtue of poverty. Poverty and virginity are not commandments of God for everyone: they are monastic virtues. Out of their eager goodness, monks and nuns offer their poverty and virginity as a sacrifice to the Lord.

The elder taught with his life that the consolation and joy of a monk are not found in material things, but in God. Poverty is a true treasure that can help one reach up to God.

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35. See note to p. 321, "A blessed and unnoticed repose."—eds.

The elder had an expression: "The more you give, the higher you fly."[36] For a monk to acquire money and material goods, he believed, was a failure, and he thought of it as a dangerous obstacle. He wanted monks "not to live by getting blessings"—alms from others, that is—"but by giving blessings."

The elder entered the arena of monastic life free from any desire for material possessions; and he left this life poor in these things, but with the treasure of his poverty. In the words of Saint Symeon the New Theologian, "I am poor because of my infinite wealth / And, possessing so much, I seem to have nothing."[37]

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36. "Give," lit. "cast away," in reference to almsgiving, which makes the phrase a pun in Greek.—Trans.

37. Third Hymn, 8–10. (*Sources Chrétiennes*, 156:188)

An Unquenchable Thirst for Asceticism

Because of his accomplishments in asceticism, monastics and layman alike referred to the elder as an ascetic. He denied it, but his labors reveal him to have been a great ascetic indeed. Many of these labors remained secret, unknown to men but known to God, Who will reward his efforts. Some are not recorded here, because they go so far beyond what we are accustomed to that they would not be properly understood. Nevertheless, we do present some practices that were described by witnesses and others or revealed by the elder himself for others' edification.

From his youth, fasting to the point of exhaustion was a part of his ascetic struggle. As a soldier, he continued his strict fast in spite of the snow as well as all the hardships and dangers of war. Although his health initially suffered at Esphigmenou monastery from his fasting, combined with his strenuous duties and the small amount of sleep that he allowed himself, he nevertheless soon got used to it. At Philotheou monastery, he was always fasting.[38] Even on the

38. Literally, "At the idiorhythmic monastery." Implied in this phrasing is that, because a lack of a common life, which means close observation by others, a monk there could even have violated the appointed fasts without being censured. He could regulate his fasting as he wished. The Elder, on the contrary, fasted more than what was required. —eds.

great feasts, he wasn't interested in food. One year at Christmas, another elder asked him to come eat with him. But Father Paisios didn't go, because he had already eaten some beans he had left over from the fast, with no oil and with flour instead of a sauce.

At Stomio, he worked hard and ate little. His stomach became, as he'd put it, "like a bird's," and a little tea and a bread-rusk would last him a whole day and night.

At Sinai, he lived the angelic life, as though he were bodiless. Free from every effort to live an earthly life, he submitted his flesh to his spirit. His body became quite thin, and he became light-footed. He simultaneously acquired ascetic grace as well as the courage, manliness, and graceful movements of an athlete. In the wilderness of Sinai, he spent the whole of Great Lent living on Holy Communion alone, only drinking a little water and eating something on Sundays.

When he arrived at the Skete of Iveron, and he saw a fig tree and a cherry tree at his cell, he said: "Glory to God. This is all I need to live here—a man doesn't need much to live." There, for three months, he ate only crushed pine-nuts. He lived on perhaps two or three spoonfuls of this a day: that was enough to sustain a true ascetic like the elder.

And, although he rejoiced in fasting and savored abstinence as though it were food, out of obedience he stopped his asceticism when he went to the hospital for his lung operation, eating whatever they gave him there, even meat.

Returning to the Holy Mountain, he threw himself again into exhausting fasts. To benefit one of his disciples, he once described these experiences. "I tried to do what the books say. I'd go whole days without eating, to the point I couldn't

move my legs. A lot of times, when I had to go somewhere, I'd collapse from exhaustion. When I was out walking, I didn't dare do anything but stick to the footpath, because I was afraid I'd fall, and I didn't want anyone to see me like that. I begged the Panagia for strength. I grabbed at the tree branches and pulled myself along to keep going."

He always fasted until the ninth hour (that is, three in the afternoon). Aside from the normal fasts of the Church, he would fast at other times, for a person in need or some other important matter. When he wanted to help someone, he would fast for three days, combining his fasting with prayer. To honor the Mother of God, he would try to pass the days of the August fast without eating.

He usually ate only uncooked food. ("It's a good thing," he once commented, "that I don't have cooking on my schedule.") In his last years, a few of the other fathers would take him cooked food, and then the elder would eat a little out of love, saying, "Every once in a while, the stomach needs something cooked."

"Elder," someone once asked him, "why haven't these fasts hurt your stomach?" He replied, "Fasting doesn't hurt the stomach. When someone's worried, though, he has to eat. When you're worried, your body's making stomach acid all the time, and that's only supposed to happen during digestion—so if you fast then, your stomach-lining gets damaged, and it hurts. A person has to eat according to his condition. If he can abstain and eat less, let him. When someone makes progress, then he can eat just a little food, and it nourishes him the same as if he'd eaten normally, because he's fed spiritually, and the little he eats is enough to sustain him."

The plate that the elder used when he ate was a small one, which held only a little food.

He tried not to let anyone find out how he fasted. Whenever he visited someone, he'd break the fast that he normally kept through the ninth hour, eating whatever he was offered if it wouldn't harm his health. When he was living at the hermitage of the Holy Cross, a friend of his who was a representative of one of the monasteries invited him to his office in Karyes to discuss a certain issue. Afterward, the monk set out a meal. The elder ate all his food, even sopping up what was left with a piece of bread. Only God knows how much he fasted afterwards in his cell.

The elder didn't want people to have the slightest inkling of how severely he fasted. But his gaunt, skeletal body was something he couldn't conceal, and it betrayed the secret of his great fasting. The demons made fun of him, calling him "bony," and they weren't lying. Once, when he traveled with some holy relics to the village of Konitsa, an old man said, "I see bones here"—the relics—"and I see bones there"—the elder. As a younger man, he was like a shadow, almost incorporeal, skeletal, as though he didn't have a stomach. As he himself wrote of Hadji-George, with eager goodness he sacrificed his flesh out of love for Christ.[39]

His good habit of perpetual fasting helped him to reach great heights of asceticism and to become a great faster. "Fasting," he would say, "helps someone a lot when it comes to ascetic labors. If someone gets used to it from a young age,

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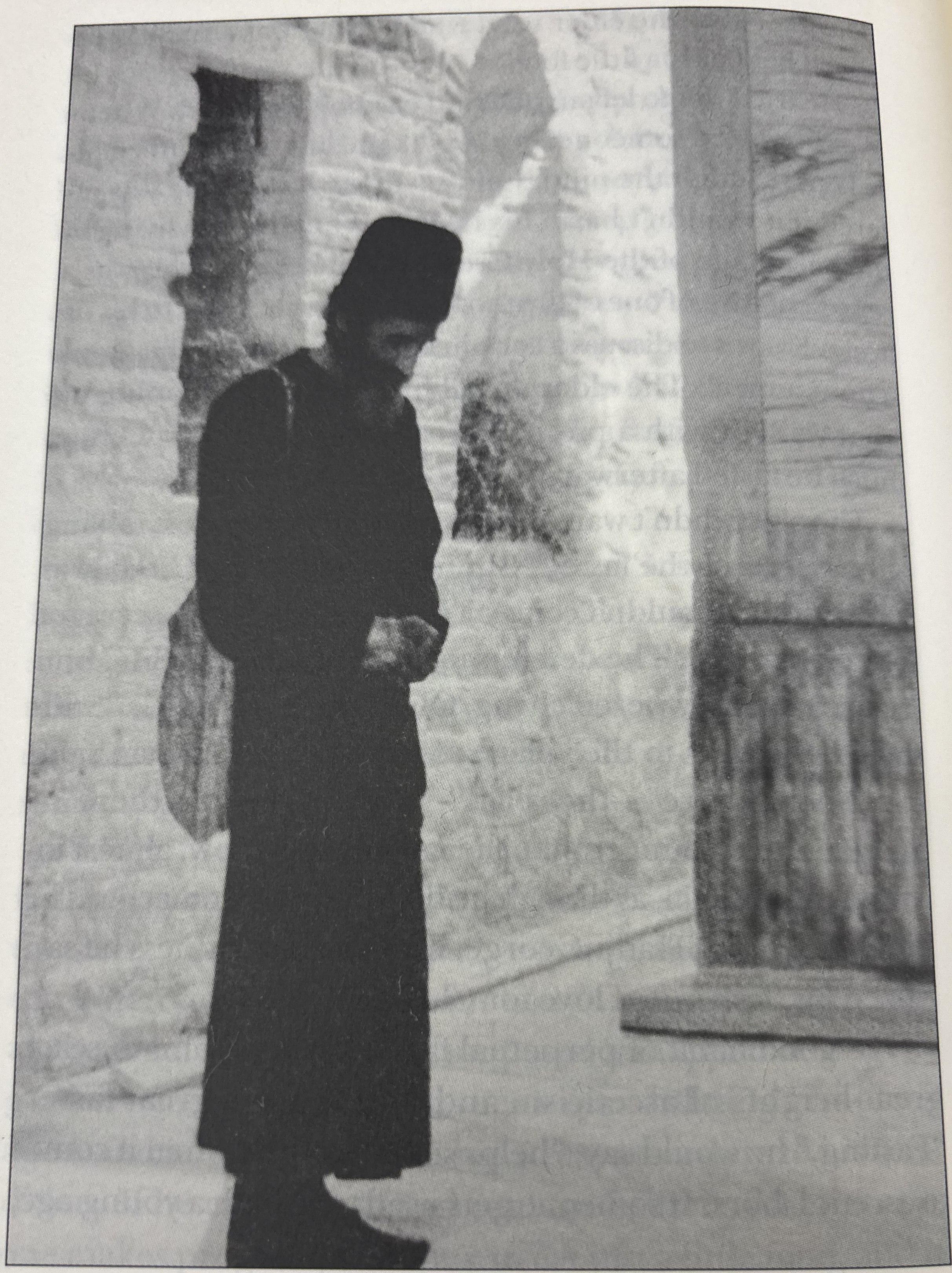
39. See *Elder Hadji-Georgis the Athonite*, p. 59. Hadji-Georgis (1809–1886) was an exceptionally virtuous and holy Athonite, held by the Elder in special reverence. The Elder was the author of his biography. —eds.



The Elder who
"offered up his flesh with eager goodness for the love of Christ,"
thus becoming almost incorporeal.

it won't be so hard for him later."[40] But his self-control and the regimentation he imposed on himself helped him far more. When his body would start complaining after an extended fast, wanting comfort, he would debate with himself: "What do you want? Here, have a cup of tea—that's enough for you." And then he'd drink some tea, not having any food with it. When he would get dizzy from fasting, he wouldn't eat. Instead, he'd trick his hunger by drinking water, and he'd continue his fast.

The elder, in addition to his severe fasting, kept vigil, praying throughout the night. "By fasts, vigils, and prayers, thou didst receive heavenly gifts..."[41]

When he lived at Esphigmenou Monastery, he would sleep for less than an hour per day, and that on the floor, on tiles or bricks. Later, when he slept on a bed of wooden planks, he would put rocks under the sheet so he wouldn't have comfort even in sleep. Someone who saw his bed at Stomio told him, "Father, you've chosen a difficult path." The elder answered, "When you want something really badly, like I want the ascetic life, you enjoy it."

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40. Here it is not clear if the Elder is referring to younger monastics or to children. Regarding the latter, his spiritual children testify that he favored a gradual introduction to fasting, according to ability. His counsels in the book *Oikogeniakē Zoē* [Family Life] are instructive. Asked if a child of five or six should fast before Holy Communion, he replies that they should at least, the night before, fast from animal products. (This is a much lighter rule, according to the Greek practice he is being asked about, than adults are to fulfill.) "But," he continues, "this is a matter for their spiritual father, because maybe the little child has health problems and needs, at least, to have milk." In response to a more general question, the elder replies that "if the child is strong and healthy, he is able to fast" and observes that "now there is a line of fasting foods" offered for sale.—eds.

41. This phrase appears in the troparion for Saint Sisoes and other monastic

He was quite pleased to sleep on his ascetic bed, with a log as a pillow and planks for a mattress. His back became black with bruises, but he was full of joy, having read Abba Isaac's words that "Self-love precedes all the passions, and scorn of ease precedes all the virtues,"[42] because "ease nourishes and increases [the passions].[43]

He never took the midday rest typical in Greece. Later, when he was inundated with visitors and would tire, his rule was to rest for up to three hours. Around midnight, he would get up and begin to pray the Jesus Prayer using his prayer-rope. Many times, however, he would sleep only three hours in as many days. With fasting he humbled his body, and with vigils he cleansed his nous and made it nimble.

He would give his whole self and all his strength to his nighttime prayers and become exhausted from standing at vigil and from his countless prostrations. In his elderly years, he would support himself on the church-stall or on what monks call a "leaning-stick,"[44] and he would use what he called his "hidden harness." This was a rope that hung from the ceiling of his cell, which he would tie around himself so that he could continue to pray upright, like another prophet Moses. When he would become exhausted, he would continue his prayer on his knees, giving a little rest to his beleaguered body.

Concerning vigils, he would say, "Drowsiness makes a

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saints. —eds.

42. *Homily* 74, p. 361.

43. *Ibid* 41, p. 205.

44. This refers to a T-shaped stick, which monks sometimes lean on when they pray. Some monks call it a "lazy-stick" (a term the elder did not like at all). —eds.

monk useless and keeps him from communicating with God. We have to struggle and force ourselves[45] constantly. At the beginning we have to force ourselves a little—the first column [of demons] passes by and leaves, if we resist. We shouldn't keep vigils to please ourselves. We can do a vigil for someone sick, and say, 'My God, make him well so he can glorify You,' and we give glory to God in that way. Or, 'My God, grant sleep to people who can't sleep, because they're in pain or because their nerves are on edge and they have to take sleeping pills.'"

As careful as the elder was to struggle secretly, people still began to realize certain things about his ascetic life. On the day before a vigil, for example, he would be dealing with people and their problems all day long. At sundown, he would leave the hermitage with the other fathers, and they would go to the vigil together. He would stand nearly the entire night in a church-stall, returning to his cell at daybreak. When did he have time to rest? And, with the first light of day, hoards of people in pain would arrive to see him. How did he endure? He was elderly and sick—where did he find the strength?

But despite all of that, he never violated his rule or tempered his asceticism: working, fasting, keeping vigil, comforting the suffering, praying, and fulfilling his monastic duties with exacting care. He was, in the words of Saint John of the Ladder, "one who constantly constrains his nature,"[46]

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45. Literally, "use violence against ourselves", but in the gospel sense: "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matt. 11:12).—Trans.

46. *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 1:4, p. 4.

and he had the mindset and disposition of a martyr.

He was filled with mercy towards all creation, both living and inanimate, and he even felt compassion for the devil. But, like all the saints, he was merciless and unsparing when it came to himself. He refused to give in to the earthen vessel of his body out of love for self, and he gave it less than what it needed. "We should only do what we have to," he recommended, "in order to meet our bodily needs. Wanting more than that chases Christ away from your heart and takes His place, and it leaves an emptiness and dryness behind."

In the beginning, he was determined to keep his ascetic rule with great exactitude. Later, he didn't have need of such strictness, because his spiritual fruit had ripened, and ascetic living had become his way of life. In any case, he employed economy when necessary. "Struggle now, when you're young," he advised, "because later you won't be able to. In the old days, I struggled a lot. Now I'm disgusted with myself—I get sick just from the cold air coming through the keyhole."

He recommended making prostrations because, in making them, "we worship God humbly, dispel drowsiness and start up our engine. Plus, we lose unnatural pot-bellies gain the body of a valiant hero." He believed that "prostrations are the best ascesis, because they bring divine grace and bodily dispassion."

"We can do prostrations three to four hours after eating," he would say. "When we're making prostrations, the knees should be close to the shoulders, and the forehead should be close to the knees." He wanted the front of one's clenched fist, rather than one's palms, to touch the ground, and, when he saw others doing the latter, he would correct

them. He didn't want any marks to show on one's hands, so he recommended using a small carpet. His limberness, speed, and endurance amazed everyone.

A monk who stayed overnight at the elder's cell reported hearing a rhythmic pounding on the floor from his prostrations, along with spontaneous outbursts from the depths of his heart, to Christ and the Mother of God. Then he became immersed in the Jesus prayer, and after that he returned to making prostrations.

Sometimes the elder would chant hymns and psalms while doing prostrations. During the summer, he would go out into the yard in front of his hermitage. There, he would make prostrations and kneel in prayer on a wooden surface four feet long and one-and-a-half feet wide, made from two boards nailed down for stability.

The elder greatly valued blessed labor. No one has ever become holy without effort and struggle. God is moved by it. "The present generation," he concluded, "has a laziness that gets brought into the monastic life too. We want to become holy without effort."[47]

"Wouldn't it be better," joked the elder, "to do vigils while lying in bed, to get a tape player to play whatever chant you wanted? To make an ascetic out of straw with a motor, who can do our prostrations and say the Jesus prayer on the prayer-rope?" In saying this, he sought to shed light on the contemporary mindset which seeks easy things and avoids physical exertion. He advised: "We

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47. "Any bodily and spiritual labors which do not entail pain or exertion are never able to bear fruit in those who practice them" (Saint Gregory of Sinai, *Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 78).

should be careful not to acquire the spirit that's out in the world.[48] Worldly people want to work a little or not at all and still get a lot of money. Students want to not study and still get good grades. You should try to struggle. Our life is a life of labor.

"Someone came and asked me to pray because he had a stiff neck. The doctor had told him to do some exercises, but he got tired of moving his head right and left, so he came here to ask me to pray for him. Can you believe it? Today even conveniences have become difficult. In their offices now, people have chairs with wheels. They never stand up because they do everything in their chairs, but they end up with sore legs. So then they go to the doctor. He gives them some exercises to do, and then they'll even pay for massages."

For the elder's generation, labor and struggle were a comfort, and hardship a means of recreation. He rejoiced in exerting himself. He had what Saint John of the Ladder calls the "feeling, or rather habit, called endurance of hardship"[49]—a disposition to exert himself to the very last. Everything that needed doing, he did himself. He kept the hermitage in good repair, and he trimmed the weeds. He would cut enough wood for the year with an axe, carry it home on his shoulder, and chop it into pieces. This he did until the last few years of his life, when he was unable to do so because of all of his visitors.

When he had to travel someplace on the Holy Mountain,

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48. "For [good] works accomplished without toil are the righteousness of those in the world" (Saint Isaac the Syrian, *Homily* 36, p. 161).

49. *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 26:77, p. 173.

he would usually go by foot. In his younger years, he walked barefoot, carrying a bag filled with stones in order to add to his ascetic labors.

The elder was physically strong, but he was no giant. His great self-renunciation, his eager goodness, and his zeal for the things of the spirit strengthened his body, and so he was able to undertake greater ascetic labors than people stronger than himself. His body wasted away from asceticism. He used up all his energy and gave every bit of his strength to Christ. He forced himself to the limits of his endurance, and sometimes beyond it, such that afterwards he would slump over, exhausted. His right hand became paralyzed by fatigue from the countless times he made the sign of the Cross while using the prayer-rope. And, in spite of this, he never stopped to rest: taking his prayer-rope in his right hand, he would make the sign of the Cross with his left.[50] From this, one can see the unrelenting spirit of his asceticism.

Most of the examples that we have given of the elder's asceticism took place during the last two decades of his life. The fire, enthusiasm, and zeal that he had in his youth, when his physical powers were at their peak, are beyond description. If he had so much zeal and performed such ascetic labors when his body had weakened with age, what must he have done when he was younger? Everyone who knew him in his youth witnesses that the mere sight of him was so extraordi-

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50. Let no one be scandalized at the elder's reaction to his exhaustion: he was like a warrior fighting with every means at his disposal, with the weapons of righteousness, on the right and the left. Once, Saint Barsanouphius the Great was asked if it is proper to cross oneself with the left hand when one cannot use one's right. He replied, "Well, as for me, whenever I want to perform the sign of the cross over my right hand, I certainly must use my left hand to do so" (Answer 437, in Greek p. 220).

nary that it provoked astonishment and awe. His zeal, in the words of Abba Isaac, was like "coals in fire in its fervent heat," which "stimulates, makes zealous, kindles, and strengthens a man at times and seasons to shun the flesh in the afflictions and fearful trials that confront him [and] to surrender his soul frequently to death."[51] As a nun who knew him said, "He died every night and arose from the dead every morning."[52]

The elder didn't recommend that others attempt the ascetic practices of his early years as a monk. In fact, he forbade them. Nevertheless, as far as he himself was concerned, he did not regret his experiments.

After many struggles, he reached a point where he could live with a minimal amount of food and little sleep receiving his nourishment through divine grace. He would say, "Someone who does not sleep on account of joy is both physically and spiritually nourished." Someone once asked the elder how it was that one of the saints was able to sleep only one hour out of twenty-four, and that while being held upright by a rope hung from the rafters. "The saint," replied the elder, "found rest in tiring himself out." And that is how he himself lived. The elder was like a machine able to run constantly with just a little fuel: the grace of God was his nourishment and support.

He wanted young monks to struggle. "The spiritual life" he said, "means entails heroism. Don't be a stagnant generation—be heroic. From the very start, when you enter the monastery, you have to give it your all, you have to cling to

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51. *Homily* 55, pp. 273–274.

52. Mother Anna Hadji.

Christ, to heaven. Bodily asceticism helps, when you do it with eager goodness. We mustn't give way easily, putting off doing our spiritual rule. Do as much [prayer] as you can, even if it's only a little, and then confess [your shortcomings] to your elder.

"Someone who's sick has to eat whether or not he has an appetite, because he knows the food will do him good. And it's the same for us—when we don't feel like doing our rule, we should act with joy, because we know it'll benefit us anyway. It requires an intense effort, but not pressure or stress. Spiritual effort isn't pressure, but a forcing oneself that helps."

He encouraged others to struggle, but he warned people about the dangers of a delusional asceticism that nourishes pride, the kind that is only concerned with bodily asceticism and neglects the soul. "The greatest struggle," he said, "Is to acquire humility and love, which are easy even for a little girl to manage. When someone adds to his bodily labors, he can add to his pride at the same time and fall into the delusion of thinking that he's something. But if he turns his attention to pride and strikes there, he can really achieve a lot easily. We have to practice humility and love first, and vigils and fasting afterwards."

"The monk," the elder would say, "has to learn to have dignity and self-control. He has to know when he should speak and when he should eat. Then he'll never harm anyone, no matter where he goes, no matter where he finds himself. Someone who doesn't have self-control is like a cow that finds food and can't stop eating, until finally it bursts. There are a lot of people who drift easily, and, because they don't have any brakes, they go downhill."

The elder's great asceticism was not formal and dry. Performed secretly and arising from a heart filled with eager goodness, it manifested his great love for God. The one who loves thirsts to suffer for the beloved.

The elder practiced asceticism as a means to purification and sanctification, not as an end in itself. It became a way and means of helping others and an acceptable sacrifice to God. With discernment, he sacrificed his asceticism for something greater. Once, for example, he ate a bit of meat to encourage an ill monk to break the fast for his health. God was gracious to the elder, and intervened so that he couldn't taste it.

Through asceticism, the elder became dead to the world. He dried out withered his flesh so that the passions wouldn't blossom. Purifying his soul and body, he was shown to be a vessel of grace.

**"And We Labour,
Working with our own Hands ..."**

1 Cor. 4:12

From an early age, the elder loved labor, helping his parents with farm work. Tireless and productive, he would harvest acres on his own, and in order to give himself some encouragement, he would start by harvesting one row down the middle of the field so that he'd be facing two small fields rather than one large one.

As a carpenter he worked hard, because he loved his craft. He worked with heartfelt sensitivity and gusto. He connected his woodworking with spiritual work and charity. As he worked he chanted and prayed; and from the money he earned he gave alms working for the poor without any payment.

As a monk, he carried out his duties with exactness and diligence, and out of his great magnanimity, he helped whenever help was needed. At Stomio, whenever he had a break from renovation work, he would make icons to give away as a blessing. He would glue paper prints onto wood and then, in place of a frame, he would glue pine cones around the edges. That's when he began to make small relief icons out of wood, a craft he was eventually able to perfect. He also had a lathe that he worked with his foot, and he used it to make various handicrafts and marvelous

wooden "artoklasies."[53]

Just as the elder was unmatched when it came to making monastic handicrafts, he was also tireless and second to none in performing manual labor. His fellow monks report that he "could cut wood faster than a lumberjack, could plane a tree as fast as a machine, and could do the work of ten men."

He didn't like fastiduousness or sluggishness on the job, for, as the Scriptures say, "the slothful of heart are treated with contempt."[54] He preferred that a monk do a little manual labor and a lot of spiritual labor. "Too much work makes a monk forget God," he would say, "like the Hebrews did in Egypt. But, when you're working, really work."

On Mount Sinai, he carved wooden icons of the prophet Moses receiving the Ten Commandments. At the Skete of Iveron, he mainly carved pectoral crosses and crosses for the service of the Blessing of the Waters. Each had sixteen figures carved into it, and every detail could be seen, even the fingernails. He was never taught woodcarving: he learned to do excellent work on his own. His carvings, in addition to their technical perfection, had a special grace, since they were made with prayer and reverence.

"Scenes showing the crucified Christ and the others there," he said, "should be natural, but the figures should be just a little thinner, more ascetic, to show the spiritual

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53. In the artoklasia service, which commemorates the miracle of the Lord (Jn 6:11) five round loaves of bread, along with wheat, wine, and oil, are placed on a small table. These are blessed, and the bread is distributed among the congregation. The "wooden artoklasies" mentioned here may be seen on p. 410 lower left icon "Stomio".—eds.

54. Prov. 12:8.

side. Christ shouldn't have a belly, and that's even more important when He's shown on the Cross, since He hadn't eaten."

"If you're concerned about skimping and saving on wood for your project," he taught, "It's not prayer. But if you're focused on how to make Christ's face more expressive, then it's prayer."

At Katounakia, he carved icons with scenes of the crucifixion—Christ crucified, and the Mother of God and Saint John the Theologian with Him. He also made letter-openers from laurel wood. He would carve verses from the Holy Scriptures on them and bless them.

At the hermitage of the Holy Cross, he mostly made wooden icons in relief. He would leave them outside the entrance to the yard and pilgrims would take as many as they wanted. He produced different designs: the Tenderly Kissing Mother of God, the crucified Christ, Saint Euphemia, Saint Arsenios, the Holy Mountain, Mount Sinai, and Christ's Cross with the spear and sponge for use as a monastic belt buckle. The hardest part of the process was making the metal molds that he would need. He would take sheet metal and cut out an oval or rectangular shape to work with. Then he would make a negative of the scene he wanted by laboriously punching through the metal with a hammer and chisel. He would search the forest for different kinds of wood, which he would carry on his shoulder during the long walk back. Once the wood dried, he would saw off the pieces that would become his icons and sand them smooth. He would then put a piece into a screw press and, after heating the metal negative in a fire, would press the metal into the wood. The images impressed on the wood in this way had a

sweetness to them. He taught the craft to other monks, and he even gave them ready-made molds to use.

At Panagouda, he carved smaller icons of the Tenderly Kissing Mother of God, which he would give to people with special needs. They were executed so well that they seemed to be alive, as though endowed with spirit.

He created beautiful, unique designs with Christ or with the Tenderly Kissing Mother of God holding wildflowers, which he then printed onto sheets of paper with his press. He also made a wood-carving of the Holy Mountain.

Seeing one of his disciples making prayer-ropes, he learned how to do so as well. He would make them from then on, knotting away even as he spoke to people, and he gave them away as blessings. There was no way he could make enough for all his visitors, and he would buy handicrafts from other poor ascetics to make their lives easier, giving those away as well. Monks sometimes donated their handiwork for him to give away as a blessing, but he preferred to give people his own work. He felt it was a worthwhile thing to do. Because of his hernia, his weakening body, and the increasing number of his visitors, in the elder's later years prayer-ropes were his main handiwork. He would dedicate many hours each day to the ever-growing number of pilgrims; and, though he concentrated on whatever discussion he was having, his hands would knot prayer-ropes, quickly and mechanically.

Handiwork restrains listlessness[55] and helps a monk to remain in stillness, but the elder didn't need that kind of support to remain in the desert. One reason he did handi-

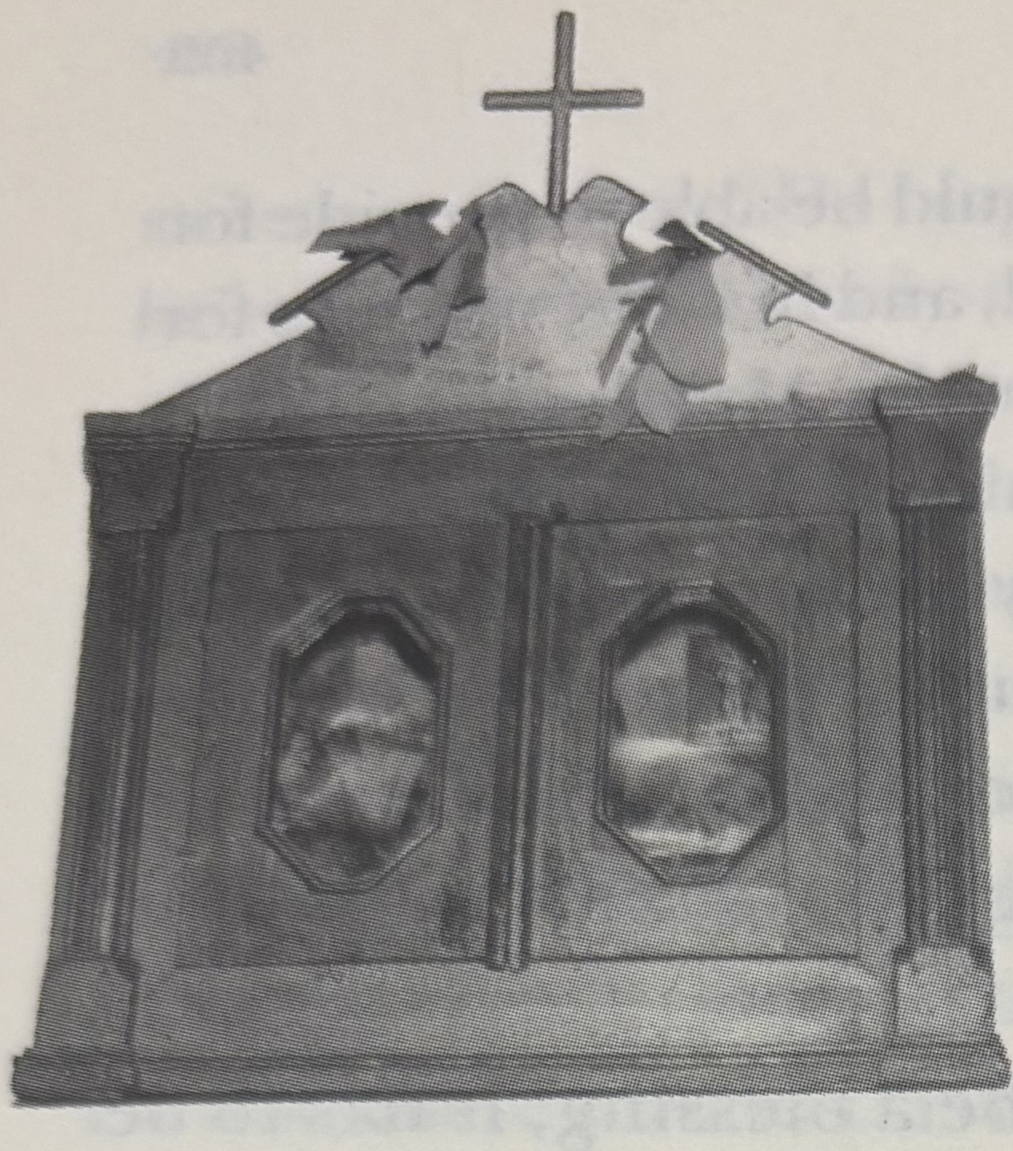
55. Literally, "acēdia" – Trans.

work, certainly, was so that he would be able to provide for his needs; but these were minimal, and in fact it was rare for him to sell the things that he made. Mainly, the elder's handiwork was an expression of his great love: he wanted to be able to offer something to everyone. He tired himself out, sharing his handiwork, as he put it, "for the glory of the Panagia." In doing so, he gave joy and comfort to people who considered it a great blessing to have something made by him.

For a monk's handiwork to be a blessing, it has to be produced with prayer and without rushing. "When we make our crafts in peace and prayer," the elder would say, "then our spiritual state is transmitted—you might say it's stamped on the things we make—and it's a blessing for people to receive them. Once, I was making an icon, and, since my hands were so used to doing it, I could say the Jesus Prayer without it interrupting my work—the icon made itself. I held the icon to me and sat with it for two or three hours... When we've arrived at a good spiritual state, where we've got so much love for Christ that it starts overflowing, then even our work turns into a prayer.

"Another time, I'd gotten an order for three small icons of Saint Demetrios. I had six months to finish them. The last month came, and I still had one to do. Well! Because I was anxious and tried too hard, it didn't come out right. I gave it away as blessing—I wasn't at peace."

For the elder, it was inconceivable to make handicrafts and perform manual labor without prayer. "Elder," a monk asked him, "what should I do now that I'm renovating the cell?" He replied, "Your hands should be working, and your nous should be set on God with the Jesus Prayer."



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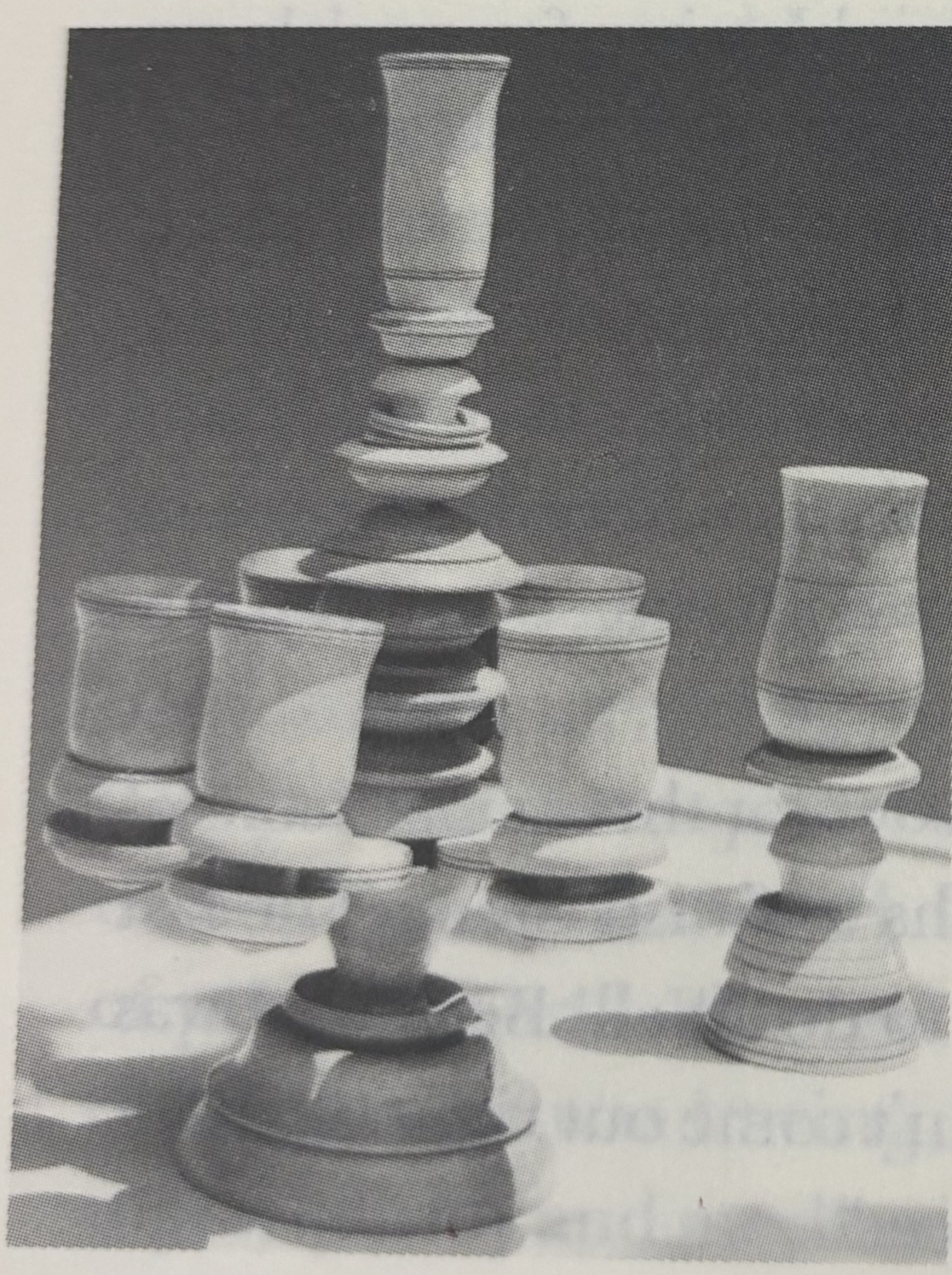
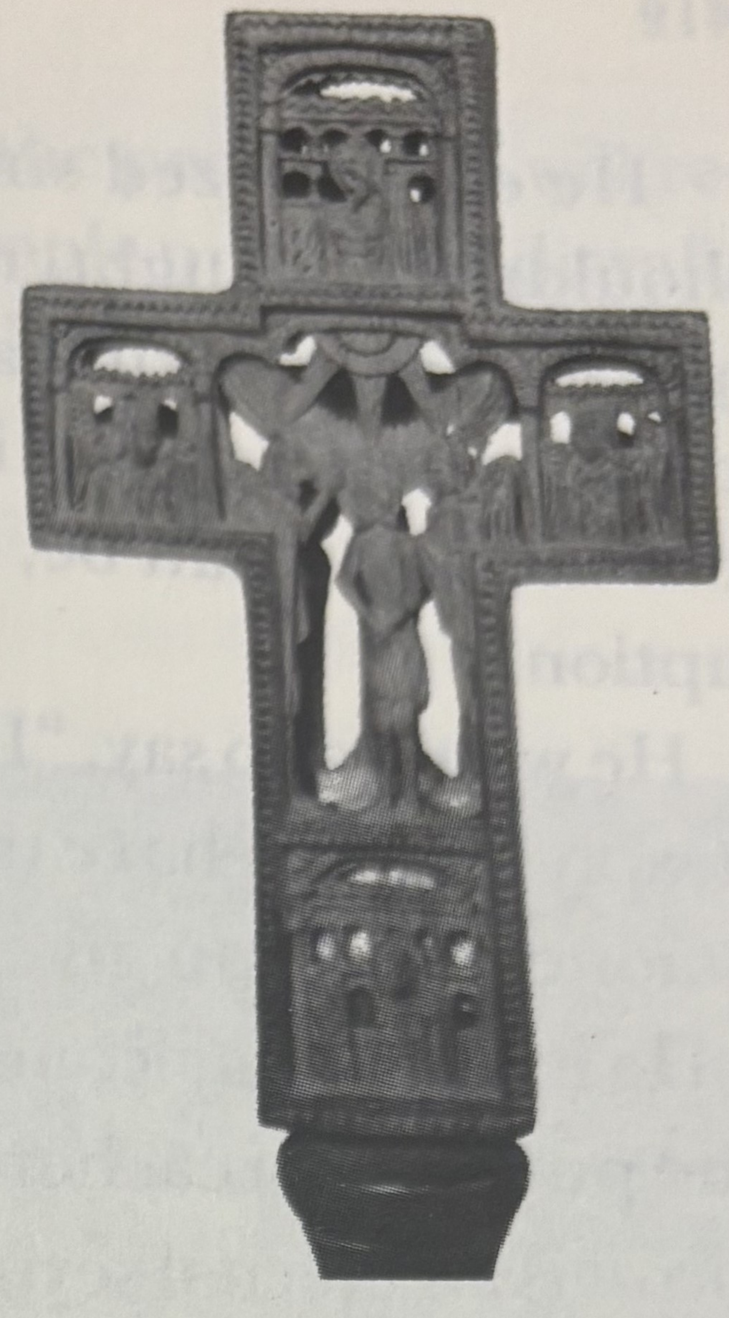


Stomio

Sinai

Some samples of the Elder's handiwork.

Katounakia



Skete of Iveron

Panagouda

Panagouda

Some samples of the Elder's handiwork.

He emphasized simplicity in doing handiwork. One shouldn't, he taught, make complicated scenes or end up spread thin by taking a lot of orders. If possible, it's better to limit oneself to one icon at a time, but to make that one icon the best it can be, so the nous can pray without interruption.

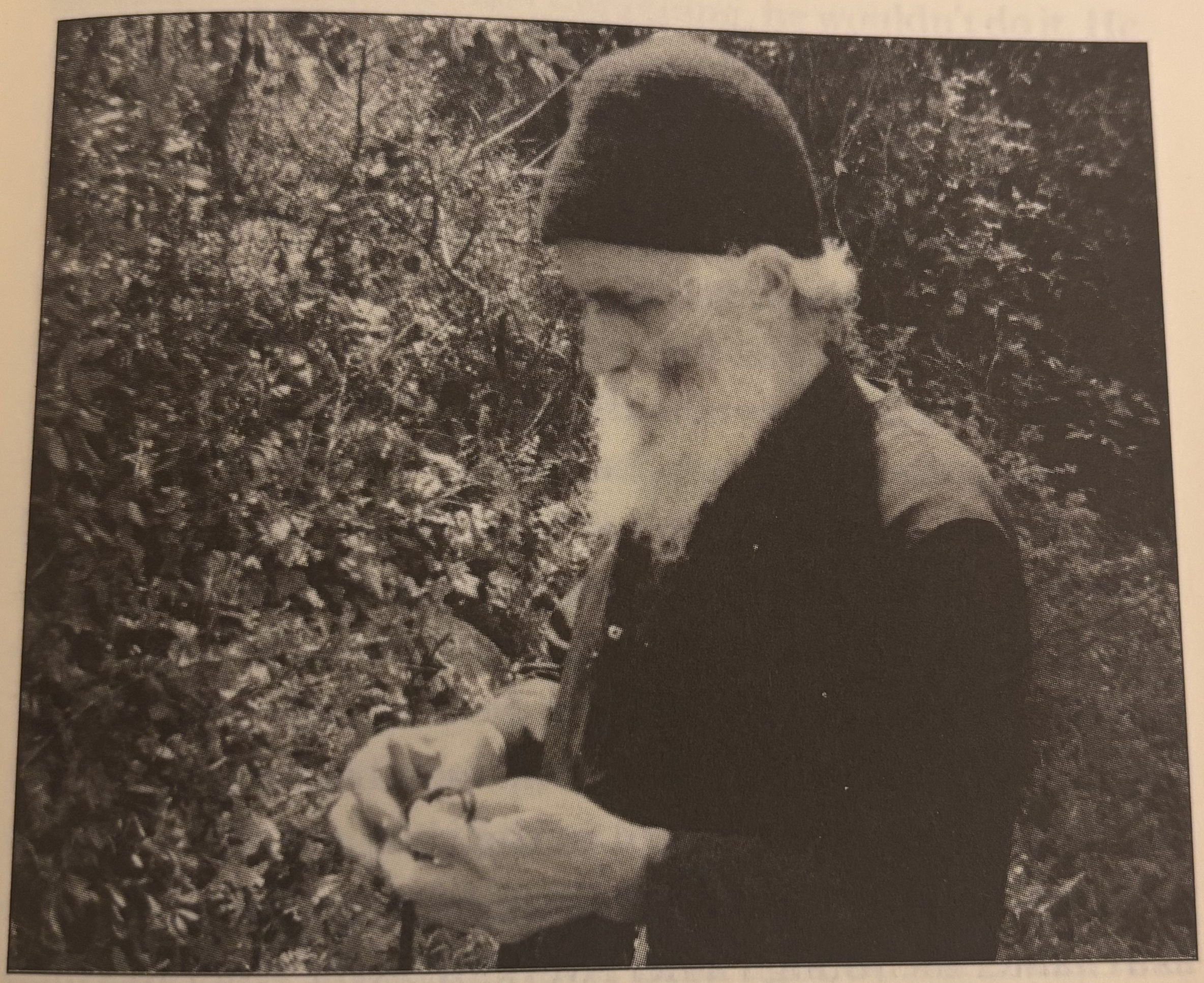
He would also say, "It's better for someone to sell his work cheaply, and not have money for alms, than to sell it for a lot of money so he can give alms."

He insisted that iconographers make good icons, because, as he put it, "A preacher's sermon only lasts a little while, but an icon is an eternal sermon. For example, we look at an icon of the Panagia, and we're comforted by it. Of course, if the icon isn't well-made, if the Panagia has harsh expression—stern eyes and so on— its 'sermon' has a negative effect. Someone was telling me, 'I go stand in front of an icon of Christ and want to open my heart. But then I see Him looking at me angrily, like a German soldier, and I tense up.'

"An icon can work miracles when it carries the grace of the saint who's in it. Whatever the iconographer loves shows up in the icon. Usually, we put ourselves in. A woman loved her sister, and she put her sister in. Everything we give completely to God takes on grace. Our handiwork reflects our interior state. If you're reverent, your handiwork will be full of reverence. If you have anxiety, then it'll transmit something demonic."

The elder naturally emphasized reverence and neatness in one's handiwork, but he saw it as a help in the spiritual life rather than as an end in itself. "In the end," he would say, "our goal as monks isn't to become monks who chant well or who are good craftsman, but proper monks—angels.

This way, your work is blessed, and the people who will receive it will be blessed. That's why people prefer handicrafts from monasteries — to get a blessing."



The Elder making a prayer-rope while conversing with people.

The Aroma of Reverence

Once a reclusive ascetic, who had heard a lot about Elder Paisios, came to visit him. They talked for a while, and he ascertained that Elder Paisios was an exceptionally reverent man. Indeed, the elder had a rare reverence, which he had learned from his parents, and mainly his mother.

While at the monastery, he benefited from many of the fathers, and especially from a particular hieromonk. He would say, "We can't reach the reverence he had—impossible. He would celebrate liturgy every day, and he struggled greatly. Once, for half a year, he ate nothing but half of a small prosphoron* and a few tomatoes dried in the sun."

When he would serve out in the chapels, this reverent priest, like other priests of the monastery, preferred to have as a chanter the young Father Averkios (as the elder was then called).

The elder had an innate reverence, but he also cultivated it a great deal. He placed such emphasis on it that he once said that "reverence is the greatest virtue, because it attracts the grace of God." To the elder, reverence was the fear of God and spiritual sensitivity. Reverent people behave carefully and modestly, because they intensely feel the presence of God.

The elder wanted reverence to be unaffected and internal. He turned away from mere external forms. Regarding a group of monks who had great order and discipline in their liturgical life, he commented, "I respect that, if it's something that comes from within." The elder's conduct was reverent, but with a freedom that was alien to dry forms. If he didn't feel something, he wouldn't do it. He distinguished reverence from piety—a word he even avoided saying. He would say that reverence is like incense, while piety is just perfume.[56]

The elder's reverence encompassed not only small and seemingly unimportant matters, but also spiritual and essential issues. "If someone neglects the little things," he taught, "the danger is that he'll start neglecting greater, holier things. And then, without realizing it, rationalizing it all to himself—'This is nothing, that doesn't matter'—he can end up, God forbid, totally neglecting the things of God and becoming irreverent, arrogant, and atheistic."

His reverence could be seen in the way he prayed, venerated icons, received antidoron and holy water, partook of Holy Communion, held icons during processions, chanted, and arranged and beautified the small chapel of his hermitage. He paid attention to details, but in a way that wasn't ritualistic or fastidiously formal. This was his own attitude toward God, which wasn't laid out in advance by

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56. "Reverence," in Greek *evlavia*; and "piety," *evsevia*. The latter word is used in the Greek of the Scriptures and Church fathers to refer to Christian reverence and correct faith; and, especially in older translations, it has often been rendered as "piety." By the elder's time, the Greek word had taken on a negative meaning in a somewhat similar fashion as the work "piety" has come to do in English: to many, it was synonymous with pietism and formalism.—eds.

any typicon of the Church: it was his personal disposition. He felt that his whole hermitage, not just his chapel, was sacred space. He arranged his cell, where he prayed, just like a little church. There was an iconostasis with many icons and a lamp that burned continuously, and he would cense and light many candles there. He had constructed his bed so that it was like a coffin, and he would say, "This is the altar of my cell." Icons and holy books never touched his bed, with the exception of an icon at its head.

The icon was rather tattered and faded, and a brother once asked him why it was in this condition. The elder tried to hide the truth, but the monk finally realized that it was like that because of his many kisses and tears. The elder reluctantly admitted, "I can get through an entire vigil that way"; that is, weeping.

He also treated the other areas of his hermitage with reverence—the workshop where he made the little icons, the guest-house where souls were reborn by God's grace, the balcony, and even the yard. He thought that it was irreverent to have a toilet inside the hermitage. It was partly for ascetic reasons that he kept it at such a distance, but mostly it was out of reverence.

Once when he was away from the hermitage of the Holy Cross, the fathers of the monastery (out of love, so he wouldn't be uncomfortable) made him a small outhouse, outside but sharing a wall with the hermitage. The elder never used it. At Panagouda, when his health had deteriorated toward the end of his life and he needed to go out frequently at night—in cold, rain, and snow—his spiritual children began to insist on building him an outhouse just clear of the balcony to make things easier for him. He

refused. "That's where the Panagia appeared," he said. "How can I go to the toilet there?"

The elder's life was fragrant with deep and unaffected reverence, just as the angels in heaven worship God day and night "with great reverence." This was clear to see from his relationship with God and from the expressions on his face when coming into contact with sacred things. He reacted to sacred objects as though they were alive.

Once, when Elder Paisios was visiting the hermitage of another monk, his hernia was bothering him. The elder of the hermitage begged him to lie down and rest a little, but Elder Paisios declined. He was only able to lie on his left side, and, if he had done that there, his feet would have been pointing at some icons, which he thought of as irreverent.

Before entering the holy altar, he would make a prostration to the floor, remove his monastic cap, and kiss the cross on the altar-curtain; and then he would enter by the side door. During the Communion hymn at liturgy, if he intended to commune, he would make full prostrations. For a time, he had it as a rule to eat nothing for thirty-three hours before communing.

Because of his great reverence for the mystery of the priesthood, the elder never assented to ordination, even though, as he once said, "It's been revealed to me three different times that I could become a priest."[57]

Plainly, the elder saw reverence as a fundamental virtue for every Christian – although, rigorous as his criteria were,

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57. Most likely these signs were not commands – rather, he was presented with the possibility of becoming a priest. When he was asked about this, he answered, "Christ gives us gifts. Do we have to accept all of them?"

he considered it something rare. To the elder, reverence was greater than most of the other virtues.

He often used it as a criterion. If a reverent person wrote or said or did something for which he was criticized, the elder, even before forming a clear opinion on the issue itself, would go out of his way to propose mitigating circumstances. He would say, "He's a reverent man—I don't believe he'd do something like that." The elder believed that this quality preserved a person from making errors, from deceptions and from falling—perhaps in the sense of the verse declaring that the Lord "will carefully guard the way of those who reverence Him."[58]

The elder considered reverence to be extremely important in all of a Christian's life and struggles, and especially those of a monk. A person's reverence, he believed, acts as a steady factor in his life, affecting everything and raising his spiritual level.

He advised monks to take care to acquire reverence. "A new monk, especially, has to be reverent through and through. It helps for him to always have the *Evergetinos* open[59] and to spend time with other monks who are reverent." When a new monk asked the elder what it was that he should pay the most attention to, the elder replied, "Reverence and attention to yourself."

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58. Prov. 2:8.

59. That is, to study it frequently. [The *Evergetinos* is a collection of anecdotes and teachings from the early Egyptian desert fathers. Unlike the *Philokalia*, a more advanced spiritual text that treats the way in which "the intellect [nous] is purified, illumined, and made perfect" (vol. 1, p.13), the *Evergetinos* focuses on the practice of Christian virtues, a necessary precursor to the exalted attainments described in the *Philokalia*.—eds.]

A Russian bishop, presented with many candidates for the priesthood, once asked the elder whom he should ordain. "Those who are reverent and pure," the elder answered—he did not say educated or energetic men, or candidates with good voices.

In chanting and iconography also, reverence was more important to the elder than technique. He was able to discern its presence in chanting or in an icon, and he would say, "If you pay attention to the meaning of a troparion, it'll change you, and you'll be able to chant in a reverent way. If you're reverent, you might make a mistake while you chant, but it'll come out sounding sweet. If you only pay attention to technique—I mean, going note-by-note, without a reverent spirit—then you'll end up like a lay chanter I once heard: he was chanting 'Bless the Lord, O my soul' like a blacksmith striking an anvil. I heard it in a car, and it disturbed me—I told the driver to turn off the tape. When someone doesn't chant from the heart, it's like he's running you out of church. A sacred canon says that people who chant with improper voices should be given penances because they drive people away from church."

Concerning iconography, he advised, "You should make an icon with reverence, like we were going to be giving it to Christ Himself. How would we like it if someone gave us a photograph where our face wasn't right? It's not right for the Panagia to be depicted like Saint Anna—I mean, not to show her physical beauty. There has never been a woman as beautiful as the Panagia was in soul and body. How she transformed people's souls with her grace!"

Of the icon of the Tenderly Kissing Mother of God, at Philotheou Monastery, he remarked, "technically, it's not

quite perfect, because Christ's feet are wedge-shaped, but it works miracles and has such grace and sweetness. It's probably because God rewarded the iconographer's reverence."

"The grace of God," observed the elder, "comes to reverent people, and it makes the soul beautiful." But he observed with sadness that contemporary people pay little attention to such things. "If a person's not reverent," he said, "If he scorns divine things, then divine grace abandons him, and he's overcome by temptations, and becomes like the demons. Divine grace won't come to an irreverent person – it comes to people who honor it." As examples of irreverence, he mentioned the sacrifice of Cain and the behavior of the sons of Eli related in the Old Testament. Their disdain provoked the wrath of God, and they were punished.

The elder considered it irreverent to place icons, ecclesiastical books, antidoron, and holy objects in general on the seats of church-stalls, and even more so on chairs or beds (except on a pillow). He suggested that people put the little icons that he would hand out in their chest pockets. Once, he related, a pilgrim came holding his head crooked from neck pain. Through divine enlightenment, the elder realized that the man had suffered this at the hands of demonic powers, because he had put a cross the elder had given him, which contained a piece of the Precious Cross of the Lord, in his back-pocket. The elder forbade anyone who lived carelessly to carry the Precious Cross.

He once told us about someone who had become possessed because he had spit in an unclean place on a day when he had communed. The same had happened to a woman who had thrown holy water onto excrement. Another time, he related, a young man who was engaged to

be married visited a conjurer, who told him to urinate on the wedding rings. Upon following the conjurer's instructions, the young man became possessed, because wedding rings are holy. The elder also gave other, similar examples of careless and irreverent people being abandoned by divine grace and becoming possessed.

He didn't think it was right to refer to the holy fathers of the Church simply by their first names; for example, as "Basil" or "Gregory." "We talk about 'Father So-and-so' and say 'Father' to monks and clergy," he commented, "and this is how we're going to talk about the holy fathers?"

He didn't want people to offer God candles made from impure or artificial beeswax or to fill their lamps with olive oil of poor quality or with seed-oil. On the contrary, he emphasized, "[we should] offer our best to God in worship. We should offer up our best efforts and our pure prayer—not our yawning." He considered it greatly irreverent to use prosphora for the liturgy that was tainted with mold. "Christ gives us His Body and Blood," he would say, "and we give Him moldy prosphora?" He would walk miles to find prosphora for the Divine Liturgy, and when he carried it he would hold it by the side, taking care not to touch the seal.

The elder tried to show gratitude and be pleasing to the One whom he loved. Out of his great love, he offered to God the very best, and he conducted himself with refinement, with spiritual sensitivity and reverence. And God, being pleased, bestowed His grace on the elder in abundance.

He Loved Righteousness

In the ancient Greek of the Holy Scripture, a righteous person is someone who observes all of the commandments and pleases God—who is, in other words, a holy man or woman. Righteousness is the common characteristic of the saints. In modern Greek, on the other hand, a "just" or "righteous" person is someone who is blameless in his dealings with others, and it is in this sense that the elder used the term.

He made a distinction between this human righteousness, in which one does no injustice to one's neighbor, and divine righteousness, in which someone consciously endures injustice while giving thanks. "Divine righteousness," taught the elder, "is to do what gives the other person joy and peace." Divine righteousness, in other words, is for a person to prefer to sacrifice his will, his peace, his being right, in order to help and give peace to another. "Spiritual righteousness," the elder would often say, "is to experience other people's troubles and problems as your own. The more spiritually advanced someone is, the fewer rights he lets himself have. Imagine we're climbing a hill with someone, carrying a backpack on our shoulders. A spiritual man will take the other person's pack too, to give him a break, and out of sensitivity he'll say that it'll do him good to take it. The heart of the matter is to put ourselves in the other person's place, to come to understand him. That's when we become Christ's kin."

"Throw human reasoning and human righteousness away," the elder recommended. "Enter into divine righteousness. Some people, even spiritual people, make a new Gospel or a different Gospel, because they don't want people to make fun of Christians. Actually, a monk should rejoice when he's treated unfairly. He doesn't have any rights, because he's following in the footsteps of Christ, Who was wronged and treated unfairly. Someone who's worldly and ignorant has a lot of rights. If his boss chews him out, he'll take him to court. A monk, on the other hand, no matter how much people do him wrong, doesn't have any rights—not even if people curse at him. God arranges things like this, so we can pay off some sin or put a little something aside. When people treat us unfairly, and we try to see that what's fair gets done, we lose whatever savings we have."

At the same time, the elder believed that, in this life too, the just God grants spiritual and even material gifts to people who consciously endure injustices, according to their situation.

In a letter, he wrote, "I saw the great, unlimited righteousness of God. There was a soul who had been treated unfairly while he served sinful people without any thought of gain for himself. Within a month as a novice, he ascended to divine vision and lived the mysteries of God."[60]

He counseled one monk, who was bickering with his fellow disciple, as follows, "Tell him he's right. Do you know how many people have gone to hell being 'right'? Fairness is wrong for a monk." That is to say, a monk is injured spiritually when he seeks to justify himself. At the same time, he of-

60. February 25, 1971.

fered this counsel regarding beginners: "In the beginning, if someone can't rise high enough to accept injustices, then clearing up misunderstandings is really helpful."

Regarding injustice, he said, "There's a charity or foundation for everyone—the orphans, the ill, the elderly. But there's no foundation for poor injustice. Everyone puts it on someone else's back, because people think it's harsh and unpleasant. But there's nothing as sweet as being treated unjustly. The most beautiful moments of my life have been times I suffered injustice. Anyone who accepts injustice accepts into his heart Christ, Who was treated unjustly. People start arguing because everyone thinks of himself as more justified than he really is. But someone with a lot of love takes injustice for himself and leaves justice for other people. Only Christ, lifting up the Cross for us, has accepted all injustice."

The elder practiced this divine justice in his life. He happily accepted injustices, and he was so sensitive that he conducted himself in such cases in a refined way, with discretion, so he wouldn't hurt or insult those who were treating him unjustly. He thought of them as his benefactors, prayed for them, and sent them gifts. "A lot of times," he said, "we think they do us wrong. But injustices actually help us. If we don't wrong ourselves, there's no one who can do us wrong. We wrong ourselves when we neglect to live spiritually. We live spiritually when we keep the commandments."

The elder didn't just limit himself to divine justice: he also took great care to not be a "partaker of other men's sins."[61] He wouldn't accept a gift if the giver had gotten it in a way

61. See 1 Tim. 5:22.

that contradicted divine righteousness. For example, when he was living at the monastery in Stomio, a rich woman rented her home to a poor family. They couldn't afford the rent, and she wanted to take them to court to get the money, which she intended to donate to the monastery. The monastery was in great financial need, but he refused the offer. "If it's money you're taking from one monastery" — that is, a poor family — "so you can give to another monastery, then I don't want it."

He would hire workers without settling on a wage first. No one complained. He gave them what was fair, and something more on top of that as a blessing.

So much did he love and practice divine justice, that he preferred to be wronged rather than to do wrong to another and to be punished because of those he had wronged.

In a letter dated April 4, 1966, he refers to a supranatural event that he experienced: "Once I begged God to let me go to hell — first of all because I'm not worthy to see the face of God (and I never was), and second for Him to make anyone whom I've ever upset, judged as a man, or treated wrong to be worthy of the Kingdom. The good God Lord allowed me to experience hell a little one week, and it was more than I could take. I tremble when I remember it. Someone who's going to hell — it'd be better if he'd never been born."

He would beg mercy from God for any injustice he might have committed out of ignorance. "My God," he would pray, "have mercy on everyone I've judged and everyone I've wronged — if I've given any alms, give the reward to them instead."

The elder was righteous even according to the scriptural meaning of the term: from his youth, he had applied himself

to keeping the commandments with exacting zeal. That righteousness was his shield and protection from temptations and dangers. Particularly when he was assigned dangerous missions during his time in the military, his righteousness provided greater protection than even the wood of the Precious Cross, because "the Lord upholdeth the righteous"[62] And, as the Psalmist also wrote, "the Lord will reward according to righteousness."[63] It also made him impervious to the countless attacks and traps of the demons. Once, someone saw the devil pacing in the yard of the elder's hermitage holding a rope. He was muttering to himself, "I can't get him to stumble even *once*?"

If we do not practice divine righteousness, we won't be able to advance in the spiritual life, and our prayers won't be heard. "So many prayers get sent up," the elder remarked once. "The whole world could have changed. But there's no justice, so the prayers aren't heard." And, yet, the prayer of even one righteous man is enough to propitiate God for the entire world.[64]

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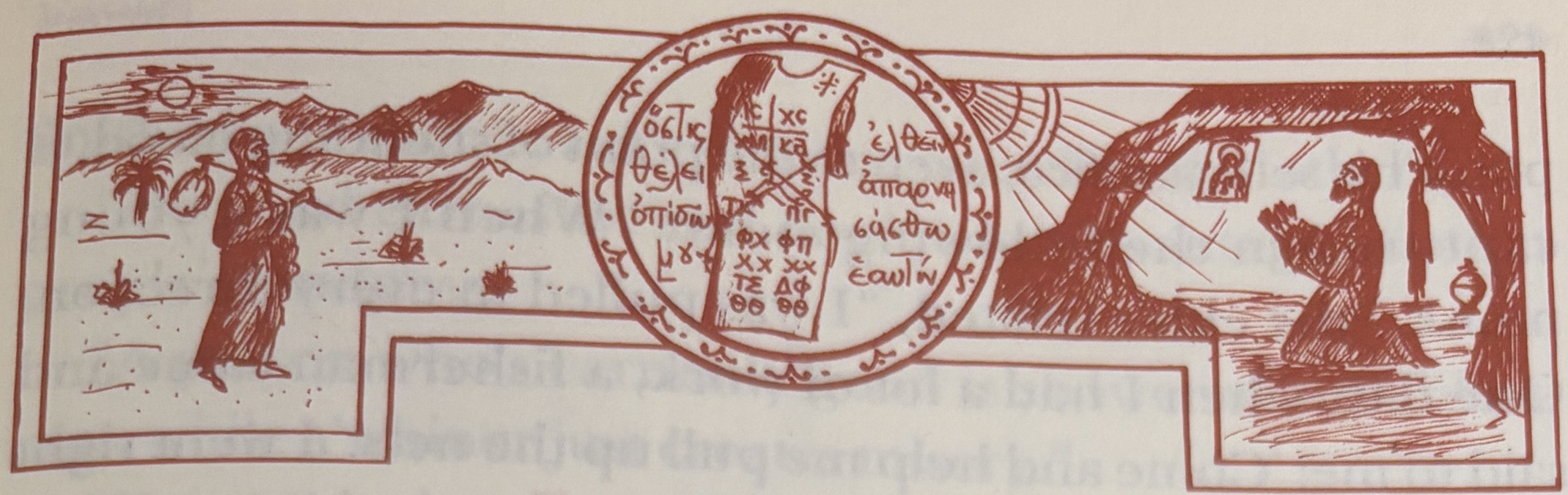
62. Ps 36:17 (37:17).
63. Ps 17:24 (18:24).
64. See Jer. 5:1.



Eager Goodness

Eager goodness,[65] according to the elder, is "goodness, reverently distilled – the love of humble people, cleaned and polished until it shines. Their hearts are full of gratitude towards God and their fellow man, and, because they're spiritually sensitive, they try to repay even the smallest good they receive." Eager goodness is whatever is done above and beyond duty and obligation, without being requested and out of selfless love.

This virtue characterized everything the elder did – from his simple acts of helping others, to his self-sacrifice in wartime for the safety of his comrades, to his monastic struggles, which exceeded the bounds of his endurance.

Being a monk, he didn't feel it was enough to go to Church services and perform his ascetic rule, and have a peaceful conscience from having fulfilled his monastic duties. He had a good kind of unrest, the kind that yearned for something to fill his soul. His eager goodness beckoned him to give himself over to greater struggles, for the sake of which he sacrificed his strength, his time, and his rest. He offered everything to God. He thought of others before he thought of himself, and he sacrificed himself to help them. An exam-

65. "Eager goodness"; in Greek, *philotimo*. For further information about this word, see note 27, p. 24. – Trans.

ple of his self-sacrifice, even to the point of shedding blood, is captured in the following story: "When I was a young monk," the elder related, "I was pulled in every direction. One day, when I had a lot of work, a fisherman came and said to me: 'Come and help me pull up the nets.' I went right away, without giving a thought to my own condition. I was exhausted from work and asceticism, and as soon as I grabbed the nets to pull them up, I started hemorrhaging. Blood was spraying like a fountain—it was hard to get it to stop."

The elder was moved when he saw eager goodness in others, and he frequently spoke of such instances, as examples to be emulated. "A woman," he related, "once said, 'Christ is grieved, and I'm the one who grieved him, so I don't want to have joy.' But she was filled with joy. She would tell people to pray to have pain of heart for Christ instead of joy. Now that's what eager goodness is! The more she'd say this, the more she'd have joy and delight. She'd gone out of herself."

His advice helped us to understand, to love, and to acquire eager goodness in all our actions:

"We should do the right thing, not legalistically or to get something out of it, but out of love for God. Then it's easy for me, not just to do the things I'm supposed to do, but also to sacrifice whatever I'm entitled to.

"We should live and act with eager goodness. For example, children should think of how they can make things easier on their parents and make them happy. We monks should know what gives our elder peace, and we should do it before he asks.

"We shouldn't let someone else tire himself out with his chores, satisfying ourselves with the false notion that we've

finished our chores. Let's sacrifice ourselves [for others].

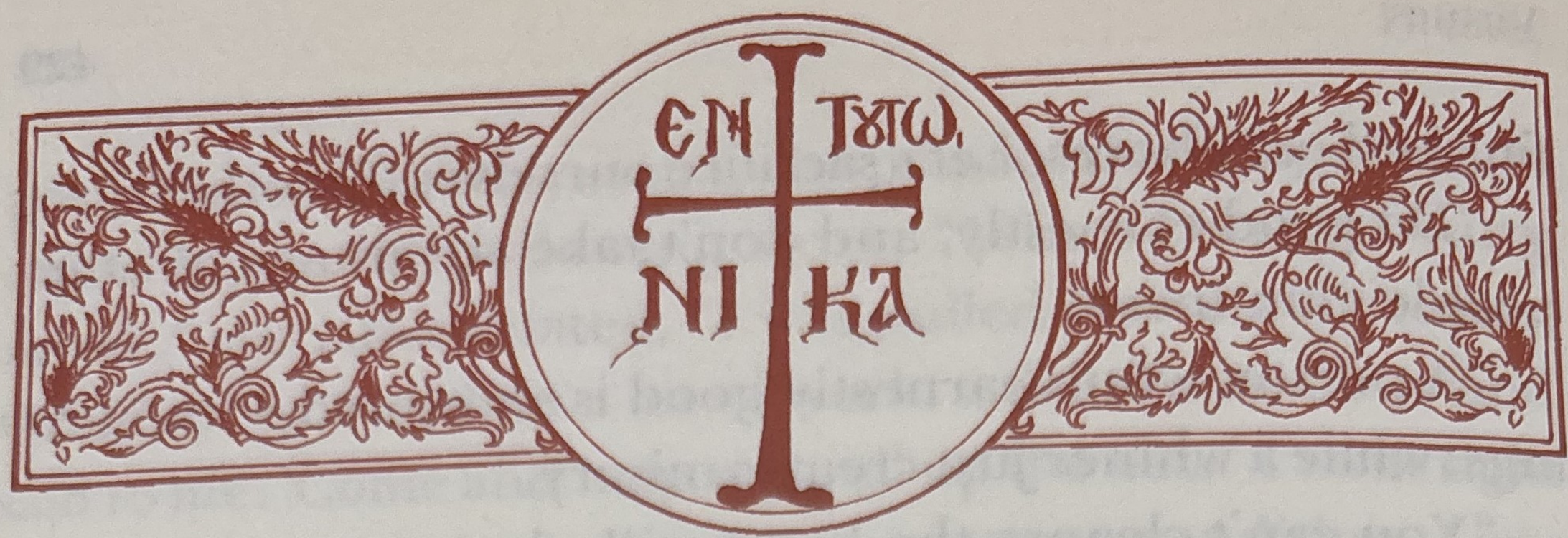
"Do good earnestly, and don't take advantage of other people's kindness.

"A person who's earnestly good is showered with blessings, while a whiner just creates misery."

"You can't cleanse the heart with detergent—it's eager goodness that does that.

"A monk who only takes from his spiritual fathers never grows up. He remains a child, with childish thinking. He doesn't sacrifice himself for others, so his heart remains hard, not maternal."

When he was a layman, this characteristic virtue of the elder, eager goodness, showed him to be a benefactor of the poor; when a soldier, it showed him to be a hero; and, when a monk, it showed him to be a Saint.



Trust in Divine Providence

The elder had great faith in God and complete trust in divine providence. He once said, "I'm a thousand percent sure that if I give someone, right now, this vest of mine, by the time I get back to my hermitage, God will have sent me another one. But at first, in order to test us, He allows us to get cold and sick.[66] You need great care here. No one should say, 'My Christ, I gave that away out of love for You, and now You let me get sick?'"

He never worried or despaired, even if things seemed difficult and dire. And this was true as much for personal matters and the affairs of those around him as it was for ecclesiastical, national, and international affairs. He saw the increasing activity and dominion of the evil one and his minions, but he knew and assured others that "someone else holds the reins." "The devil ploughs," he would say, "but Christ sows the seeds." "God," he believed, "doesn't let something bad happen unless something good will come out of it, or unless it'll at least prevent something even worse from happening."

This hope which "will not be put to shame" accompanied

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66. "For without trials," writes Abba Isaac, "God's providence is not seen" (*Homily* 3, p. 26).

him in every aspect of his life, especially in difficulties.[67] In the midst of darkness and fog, he spoke of clear skies. "By the grace of God," he would say to desperate souls, "everything will be all right." To someone who was worried about schemes against their homeland, he replied with a hopeful answer: "If they tell me that there are no more Greeks, I won't worry. God can resurrect a Greek. One is enough." He also believed that "even if there's just one Christian left, Christ will fulfill His plan." When others spread fear and talked of ominous developments for the nation's future, the elder radiated optimism and hope. He spoke about a resurrected Greece and the recapture of Hagia Sophia.[68] "There is a God," he once said to a clergyman with a bleak outlook on the future of Greece. "What have you done with Him?"

"If I didn't trust in God," he would say, "I don't know what would've happened to me. People can make things happen up to a point. After that, it's up to God. We've got to have complete trust in Him." For the elder, God's help was not just a hope, but a certainty proven by innumerable examples. He experienced the intervention of God, in various ways, countless times in his life.

When he was a soldier, he had given away his Bible, and he had been looking for another so that he could read the word of God. For Christmas, two hundred packages were sent to his unit—his was the only one with a Bible.

Once, in Stomio, he gave the undershirt he was wearing

67. Isa. 28:16 (also Rom. 10:11)

68. See note 233 on p. 286.

to a poor man, which left him with only his cassock. On his way down to Konitsa to run errands, he went by the post office. There he found a package with undershirts waiting for him. "When you give," the elder believed, "God gives to you, too."

While he was in Katounakia, he needed some sweet food for health reasons, but he didn't have any. Then a visitor came who brought him figs and raisins. "These are for you," the man told him, and the elder gave thanks to God.

One time the elder was walking down a path, and he found a big, beautiful mushroom. "Glory to God," he said. "When I get back, I'll cut it up and have it for my dinner."

When he returned, an animal had eaten half of it. Instead of getting upset, he again gave thanks to God. "Glory to God," he thought as he took it, "It's just what I needed."

When he came out of his hermitage the next morning, the whole yard was full of mushrooms. And again he gave thanks to God.

"Glory to God," he said—for the one, for the half, and for the many.

"I went to see the elder," one of his spiritual children recalled, "at the hermitage of the Holy Cross, and he had some slippers that I thought looked a little odd. They were leather on the bottom and knitted wool on top, and I'd never seen anything like them.

'Where did you find these slippers?' I asked him.

'You can take them,' he said.

'Elder,' I asked, 'what am I going to do with them? I only asked out of curiosity.'

'No, take them – they'll bring me new ones.'

"I didn't want to take them, but at his insistence I gave in. Before I left, a monk came from Stavronikita, carrying a package.

'Let's open it,' the elder said, 'and see what's in the mail.' So he opened it, and inside, among other things, was a pair of slippers.

'There!' he said to me. 'You see?'"

One time, a pilgrim who was visiting the elder found himself getting cold. "What can I get you, my child?" the elder asked.

The elder looked around, but he couldn't find anything, so he gave him the knitted sweater he was wearing. As soon as the visitor left – within the hour – someone came and brought him a small package with a sweater inside.

"One year," the elder recalled,[69] "I was sick for fifteen days with a fever and the chills. I had no stove and I couldn't make tea or even go outside. I thought I was going to die, and I covered myself with Father Tikhon's Schema. Then I felt such grace! I found myself outside my cell, in the light, and I saw everything through new eyes. The birds, the fish, the planets and the whole world, were all speaking and saying that God made everything for you, for man.

"I begged God to let me be alone when I die. Just thinking it, I was filled with joy and jubilation. Being abandoned, humanly speaking, and not having human consolation brings great divine consolation."

69. The elder may be referring to 1971.

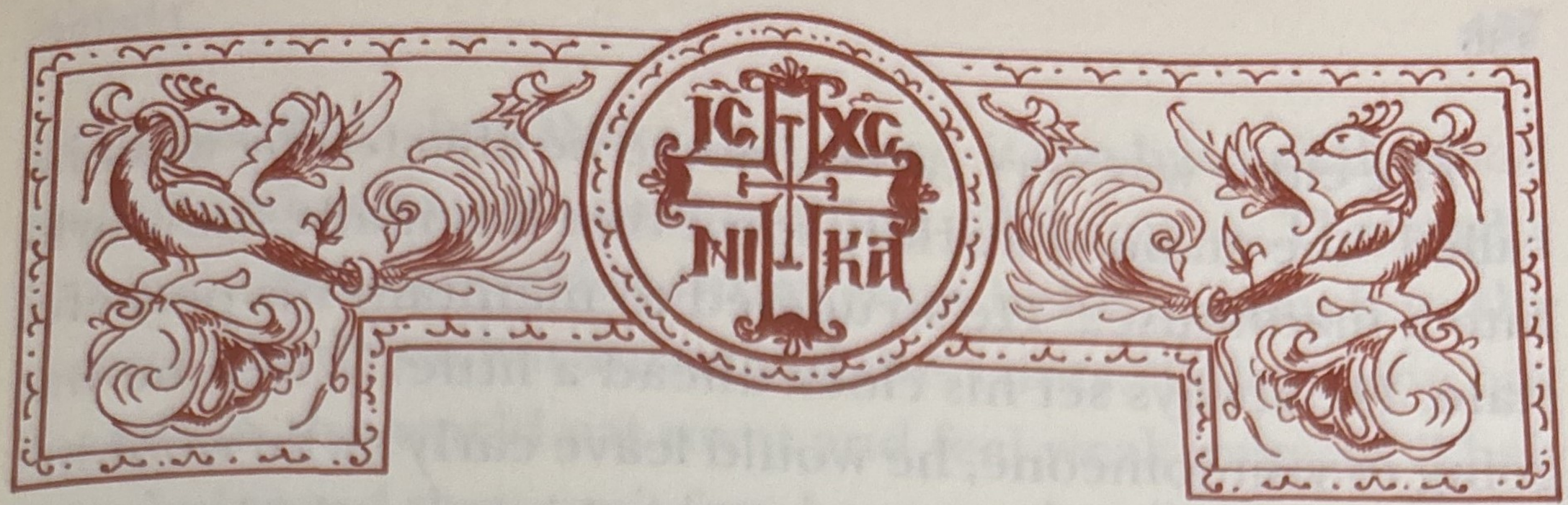
This is why the elder didn't go to the doctor when he was sick. He gave himself over to the providence of God with trust and patience, saying, "When I'm sick, I don't want anyone to come by, because God will console me."

How could he not trust in God, after all the times divine providence had cared for him "... as a nurse cherisheth her children"?[70] And, by human means or miraculous interventions, God provided—as to a worthy and chosen child—everything from the smallest to the most essential, usually without the elder having to pray for it. And so he would say, "A child feels so secure when his mother is embracing him! The faithful feel even more secure when God embraces them. I feel joyful now, like a child being embraced by his mother. God's embrace is like paradise. Everything stops—even prayer. You're living in paradise."

The elder could be described with the words of Scripture: "Blessed is the man who put his trust in the Lord, and for the Lord shall be his hope."[71]

70. 1 Thes. 2:7.

71. Jer. 17:7. [OSB: Jer. 17:3.]



An Angel of Peace

"Peace," the elder said, "is the spirit of God; other things [that is, confusion and disarray] come from the devil." Indeed, in the words of Saint John of Kronstadt, "The expansion, the peace of heart through lively faith in Him, proves more clearly than the day, that God is constantly present near me, and that He dwells within me."[72] As Saint Nectarios of Pentapolis teaches, "One who is deprived of peace is deprived of divine grace."[73] Peace is the fruit of grace, and it dwells in humble and pure hearts.

The elder acquired this peace, not only by stripping away the passions, but also more importantly by his relationship with the Lord of peace through unceasing prayer.[74] He considered this inner charismatic state of peace to be superior to prayer. This spirit of peace spread out around him. It could be seen in his speech, in his movements, in his joyful radiant countenance, in his handiwork, in the way he accepted and encouraged others, and particularly in his prayer. In his presence, the air one breathed was different.

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72. Saint John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ*, in Greek, p. 100.

73. Saint Nectarios of Pentapolis, "*To gnōthi sayton*" [To know yourself], p. 207 [in Greek].

74. "For [Christ] is our peace" (Eph. 2:14).

The elder was very careful not to be affected by what he called "the anxious worldly spirit that has made the world into a madhouse." He struggled to maintain his peaceful state. He always set his clock ahead a little. When he was going to visit someone, he would leave early so he wouldn't have to rush around in a panic, which would harm his prayer. Especially in Church, he wanted us to pray in peace. When he saw that disorder was causing confusion during a service, he would discreetly intervene to restore order.

"Peace in the world," he would tell people, "will come from inner peace. Peace movements can't help."

Peace can be acquired through repentance and, as Saint Isaac teaches, "good order."[75] "Real peace comes," taught the elder, "if your inner man is set in order and if you're careful not to give the devil any rights [to interfere in your life][76]—because temptation tries to take your peace away by surprise."

A young monk once asked the elder what to do when he didn't have time to finish his spiritual duties on schedule, since he'd end up disturbed and upset when it happened. The elder answered, "Do your prayer-rope for a little while—for yourself, for the living, and for the reposed—with peace and without hurrying. And, later, when you have the chance, do the rest."

He emphasized that peace helps in the ascetic life: "When the spirit has the peace of God inside it, it doesn't need

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75. "Good order generates peace" (*Homily* 48, p. 233).

76. That is to say, it is through the free choice to sin that a person gives the devil a "right" to interfere in his life. See p. 546 ("A Foe and Persecutor of the Demons").—eds.

vitamins. But when there's no peace, it can have all the food and vitamins it wants, and nothing will happen. That's why having a good interior inner state helps so much in the ascetic life. It's what sustained the saints. This is why our friends in the world eat meat and feel weak anyway. Their legs shake and they can't fast, because they live in stress and anxiety, and they're producing stomach acid all the time. When man's inner state is in order even a little food nourishes him.

Someone once asked him, "Why do some souls lose their peace over things that don't really matter?"

"What's missing," he replied, "is vigilance. You have to be vigilant, because that little troublemaker[77] attacks when you least expect it. That peace wasn't real peace. Someone thinks he's losing his peace, but what's really happening is that he's just adding confusion to the confusion he already had. Someone who has real peace pardons everything."

Regarding monks, the elder emphasized, "Since they don't have any responsibilities, there's no excuse for them not to have meekness. They just have to look after themselves. When they've put themselves in order, then they'll be meek. Then it doesn't matter what anyone says to them—they'll be able to take it. When we're ready and watching, insults won't bother us at all."

Disturbed souls who were searching for this peace that they so desired—or better, who were searching for the God of peace—took refuge near the elder. He was a quiet harbor that the vicissitudes of the world could not disturb. Even

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77. That is, the devil. See note 67, p. 80 ("Annoyances from the little troublemaker").

when his position of responsibility required that he correct people, set matters in order, or rouse within himself a righteous anger, his peace didn't leave him. This is because he didn't act with bitterness, but with dispassion, zeal for God, and love for the one who had lost his way—on whose behalf he suffered more than did the person himself. Once, when he saw someone whose writings bitterly judged and blamed many others, he shook his head in sorrow. "Oh my" he said, "that person's going to end up in hell, and he won't know why." Even though he was involved in many different issues and situations, God guarded his heart, and the peace "which passeth all understanding"[78] did not abandon him. Around him, men were at peace, and even wild animals became tame.

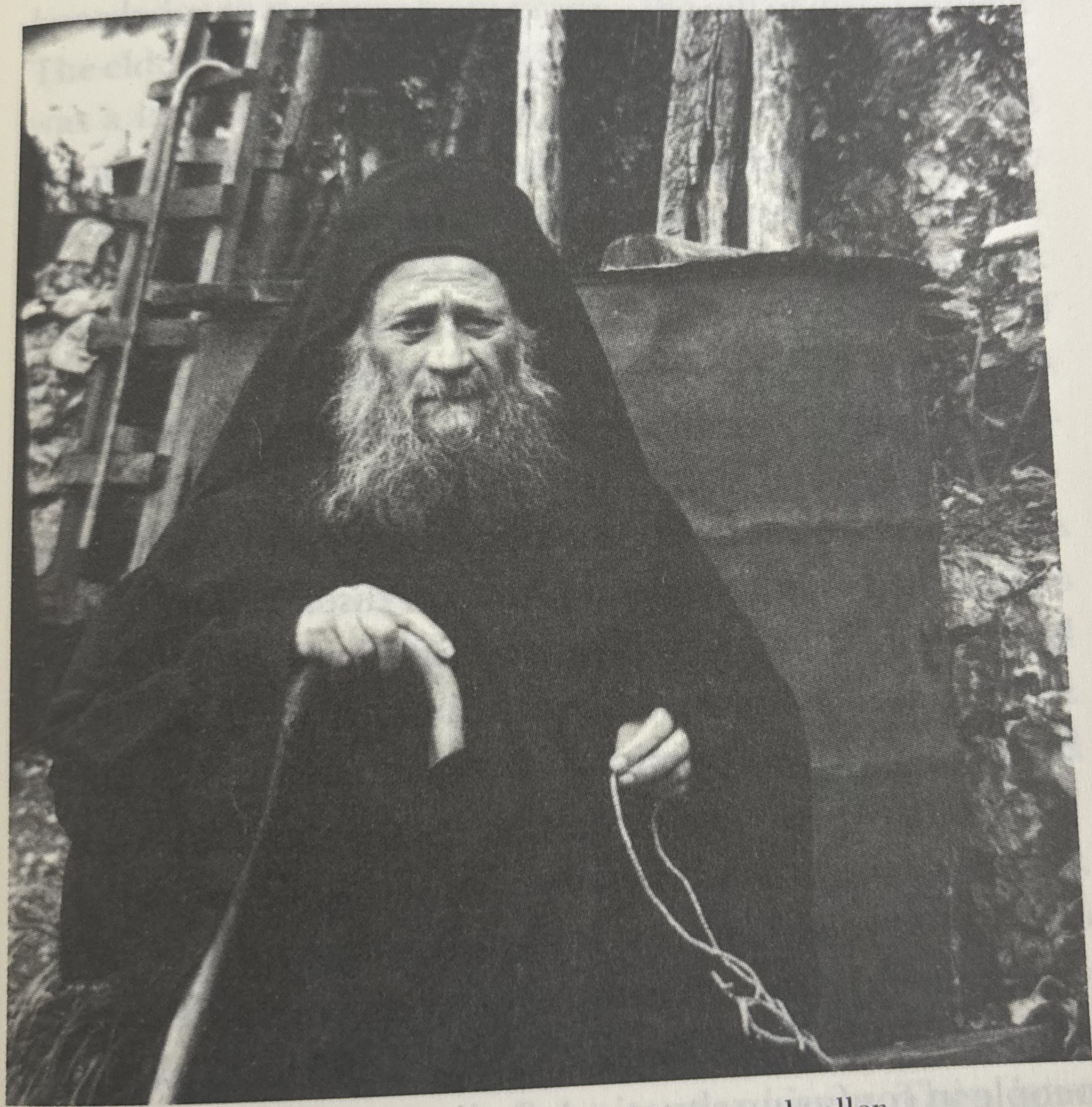
A disturbed young man, full of despair, once came to Panagouda with a rope in his hand. "Help me, elder," he told him, "or I'll hang myself right here in front of you." The elder took him by the hand and led him to the guest house. They talked, and after a while they came out. The young man left the rope behind him, and he departed from the hermitage happy, full of hope and peace.

The elder was not only a peaceful man, but also a peacemaker. He reconciled children and parents, spouses who wanted to divorce, and employers and employees, and he reconciled every soul that came to him—first with itself, and then with God and with others.

A spiritual child of Father Ephraim of Katounakia, the blessed Elder, reports that he called Elder Paisios a peace-

78. Phil. 4:7.

maker with the gift of resolving others' conflicts[79]. Father Ephraim was an eyewitness in an incident in which Elder Paisios, averting a temptation, kept the peace between two hieromonks. With humility, the elder took responsibility for the mistake one of them had committed, saying "It was my fault" and making a prostration.



Elder Joseph the Hesyhast, the cave dweller.

79. Father Ephraim of Katounakia, and father Ephraim of St. Antony's Monastery of Florence AZ., were spiritual children of father Joseph the Hesyhast, the cave dweller. – eds.

A Lamp of Discernment

The elder's discernment was a gift from God, a great blessing to him, to those who sought his advice, and to the entire Church.

Even before he was a monk, the elder had a natural discernment, acting with prudence and wisdom.

He also truly understood the nature of living things. His observations and explanations regarding animal and plant life impressed even experts. He was very familiar with the human body, with its operation and its diseases, and without ever having studied, he gave practical advice so useful that it led to people's healing. He was intimately familiar with the human soul. He was a spiritual surgeon, and an outstanding 'psychologist' in the patristic sense—a doctor of the soul. He would discern a man's character, his spiritual condition, and his problems, and help him appropriately.

He was highly and uniquely experienced in spiritual matters, gave valuable spiritual counsel, and he helped many people in confusing situations to discern whether what was happening to them was demonic or from divine grace. A person who's tasted wine can easily distinguish it from vinegar, even though they have a similar color. The elder said, "It's another thing entirely when God enlightens

someone, but, from the little experience that I have, I can see a beginner and understand his situation – how he'll develop and how he'll do."

In the spiritual life, there is a type of knowledge one can gain from theoretical learning. Superior to this is knowledge that comes from experience, but even more precious is the knowledge that comes from grace – the gift of discernment. The elder, who combined these last two types of knowledge, was a lamp of discernment, lighting the darkness and illumining the indiscernible. He held the Prophet Daniel in particular honor. He revered him, marveled at his humility and his great discernment, and studied his prophecies. When he recognized that someone had the gift of discernment, he would point it out, saying, "That elder has discernment," or, "The elder said something very discerning."

People of every age and station ran to the elder to ask his advice. Many came from far away just to hear a yes-or-no answer to a dilemma. Others who asked him for help had serious problems, or found themselves at a dead-end in life. The elder guided them with discerning advice, comforted them, and, many times, changed the course of their lives.

He was once visited by a reverent, charitable craftsman, who gave his employees generous salaries in order to help them with their needs. Because his generosity was raising the cost of labor, other craftsmen made trouble for him. The elder advised, "Give them all the standard wage. Then, later, give them whatever else you want to, and tell them, 'You have a child in college,' or 'You have a daughter to marry,' and so on." The man left happy and relieved.

Once, a virtuous priest from the world faced a tempta-

tion. A woman asked him if she could have sexual relations outside of marriage—and if he answered "no," she warned him, she would commit suicide. The priest, who was moral and God-fearing, couldn't reason with her, so he said he would think about it in order, to buy time to go to the Holy Mountain and see the elder. He was afraid that he would unintentionally become responsible for her suicide. The elder said, "Tell her to go ahead and kill herself. Just by thinking about fornicating, she's already committed spiritual suicide." The elder said this because he could discern, by the gift of divine grace given to him by God, that she was not in fact intending to commit suicide: that she had only said what she did to coerce the priest into changing his counsel. When the priest said this to her, she left humbled (and of course did not kill herself).

The elder clearly expressed his positions on ecclesiastical and national matters, in addition to personal ones; and the events that followed would confirm his views.

By the grace of God, the elder had been initiated into the mysteries of God and acquired "the nous of Christ."[80] He understood that God acted for the sake of the salvation of every person, and he studied and explained the spiritual law.

He had a five-volume edition of the Old Testament, with commentaries, which he studied carefully. He underlined certain quotations in the commentaries in red, and in the

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80. 1 Cor. 2:14–16. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? but we have the mind [lit. *nous*] of Christ."—eds.

margins he recorded comments or spiritual explanations of events. These subtle and discerning notes demonstrate his divine illumination and God-given discernment.

Many times, before someone was able to tell him about a trial or a blessing, he would tell the person why God had sent it.

One father asked the elder why his child was constantly ill. "Don't work on Sundays or holidays," he replied, "and he won't get sick again." And that's exactly what happened.

Once, the elder was at a friend's house in Athens, and someone asked him to pray that his wife would conceive a child. Another man, having heard what he asked, commented, "The reason God hasn't given you a child is that you haven't asked with faith." The elder, seeing the future, thought to himself, "Oh no—this man's own child is going to die." He didn't say anything, though. Sometime later, he got a letter with the bad news.

"A man will be known by his appearance," says the Word of God."[81] But someone who has the gift of discernment can see behind façades, which are often deceiving, to make a spiritual diagnosis. The elder discernment was like a spiritual X-ray that showed him an exact view of each person's character and inner make-up.

"Someone who's advanced in the spiritual life," he said, "learns about people and understands them through how they look, and through their eyes. His impression could be off by, at the most, twenty percent—for example, he might see someone deep in thought and suppose that he's troubled, when it's really just something passing. But when it's

81. Sir. 19:29. [OSB: Sir. 19:26]

something serious a person needs help with, God will tell him things about the person in advance—what he's like, his age, his problems. But you need humble thoughts."

A famous clergyman came to visit the Holy Mountain. At the monasteries he visited, the monks held gatherings, listening to him attentively and honoring him as a saint. When the clergyman visited the elder, the elder asked him two questions. From the man's answers the elder understood what divine grace had revealed to him: he discerned simplicity and reverence in the clergyman, as well as error and naivety.

One man praised another clergyman for his activities and administrative abilities, and the elder listened attentively without speaking. Then, after he had finished, the elder commented, "He's like a walnut tree. Walnut's good for furniture, but unfortunately, if someone's not thinking and sleeps in its shade, he'll wake up sick."[82] He wanted to point out that a person with some virtues might also have soul-destroying passions. Commenting on someone who made astute observations, but lacked discernment, the elder remarked, "He tosses diamonds around—too bad for you if one hits you in the head."

He had the gift of noticing insignificant things, overlooked by most people, that would eventually become serious. This was true with regard both to people and to monasteries as well as monastic brotherhoods. "You pay all this at-

82. There is a folk tradition in Greece that the shade of a walnut tree is injurious to one's health. (This belief may owe to the fact that the area under a walnut tree, because of chemicals the tree releases, is notably inhospitable to many kinds of plant life.)—eds.

tention to a harmless wound," he said once, "and you don't notice a little pimple that's going to end up being something serious."

Decades ago, the elder went to visit a monk's cell. He noticed that the monk had a battery-powered doorbell. This would have seemed an insignificant detail to many, but the discerning elder shook his head with sorrow. Later, the monk's cell became like a house in the world. As the elder remarked, "He had a cancer inside him" – that is, a worldly mindset.

Commenting on a man who had come to be a monk and brought along a lot of material goods, the elder said, "Eh. You'll see him hauling that stuff on the way out, too." And, sure enough, after only a few months, the man returned to the world carrying all the things that he had brought.

Another time, commenting on the action of an Athonite, the elder remarked, "So, what do you think's going to happen now? He'll wind up in the world and throw it all away." And that's exactly what took place.

The elder knew the ways of the Holy Mountain as few did, and he foresaw how matters there would develop. He grieved for the Garden of the Mother of God, and he prayed, spoke, and counseled, though he was rarely heard. With discernment, he avoided the traps and snares of worldly efforts aimed at the ostensible good of the Holy Mountain. When a representative of one of the monasteries wanted to go ahead with one such project, thinking that it would be something positive, he went to get the elder's blessing. But the elder avoided seeing him, and later he explained what it was the man wanted to do and the disastrous consequences his apparently good and innocent action would have for the

Holy Mountain and the Church.

The elder revealed the will of God to many people. When he didn't know it, he would examine the subject from all sides, without bias—he'd wrack his brain, as he put it.

When the elder sought to learn something from God, he would shut himself up in his cell for days in fasting, repentance, and prayer until he received an answer. Then, like the prophets, he could say, "Thus saith the Lord"—then he knew the will of God from God Himself. What had been dark and indiscernible was illumined and clarified.

"We shouldn't," he taught, "ask God for revelations when we can receive counsel from others. God has arranged it like this for the sake of humility. If we don't, we might really fall into delusion. Only when you can't find someone to give you advice to inform you—it's only then that God Himself takes the elder's place, gives you information and enlightens you. For example, if you can't find someone to explain the Holy Scriptures to you, then God Himself will enlighten you and reveal things to you internally."

The elder advised us to have discernment in everything. Regarding the ascetic life, he said, "Beginners experiment on themselves. A seasoned ascetic is like an old grocer—he just taps the scale with his finger, and he knows how much to add or subtract."

In order to show how essential it is to have discernment in the ascetic life, he related a story about himself. "At the beginning of my life as a monk," he said, "I was really ascetic and used my prayer-rope all the time. But it wasn't just that. As soon as I'd go take a rest, a temptation would come, and it'd say to me, 'Quick, get up and do your prayer rule. You're sleeping and resting—don't you care about the people who

are suffering in hell?' And I'd get up right away and start praying for the people in hell. I really felt for those souls. But I almost went crazy."

In particular, the elder taught that spiritual fathers must have great discernment when they apply the Rudder. "The canons are very severe," he told someone once, "and people break them anyway. Imagine if they were lenient! People would really live loosely. It takes discretion to apply the canons, because you can do a lot of damage with them. You should apply them strictly to yourself so you can make concessions for other people. Inside economia*, there's also a blessing."

He also said, "All our alms should be given with discernment. It's like the Lord said in the Gospels: 'Every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.'[83] The salt is discernment." He, nevertheless, recommended that we at least give something to everyone who asks, even to rich people.

As to judgment, he taught, "When we have good thoughts and we're looking at everyone as a saint, we have to have discretion. Because, if the person we're calling a saint does something that isn't good, we might say, 'Well, since so-and-so is a saint, and he did it, it must be good.' We have to be able to tell gold from copper. And, when it comes to gold, we have to know how many carats it is—it goes from nine to twenty-four."

One time, someone asked him, "Elder, when I see a passion in someone, what should I do? Should I try to see it in a good light, like it's a virtue, so I won't criticize him?" The elder answered, "No, you should see it like it is. You should

83. Mark 9:49.

say 'so-and-so is this, that, and the other,' but you should think about his mitigating circumstances. You ought to say, 'I'm worse than he is, because no one helped him. If he had been helped as I have, he would be working miracles.'"

With tactful discernment, he evaluated people correctly and judged fairly, but without falling into judgment. He ranked himself lower than the worst sinner. He believed it deeply, and he would repeat the parable of the talents as an illustration.

From experience, he taught, "The way I understand it, there are four kinds of people. There are the healthy and the frail as well as people with benign tumors and people with malignant tumors. The last kind are incurable. With the second and third kinds, you've got to use discernment to treat them, which also has to do with how much they want to be treated."

He dealt with each soul with discernment, avoiding extremes and partiality, and he dispensed the appropriate medicine. If different people had the same problem, he would give different solutions: he wasn't a steam-roller. This was the approach he recommended to others. "We can't deal with everyone the same way, we can't put everyone on the same diet. We need to decide what to give to each person according to his disposition, his struggle, his thirst. That way, we won't hurt anyone." Frequently, when he gave specific advice to someone, he would emphasize this. "What I'm telling you is for you. If you tell it to someone else, it won't help; in fact, it'll do harm. Watch out for that." This was the main reason he didn't like to be recorded. He knew each person's disposition, receptivity, and resistance, and he spoke to each accordingly. His words, actions, and recom-

mendations were clear and balanced.

Many times, he knew in advance what reaction his action would produce. Occasionally, when he wanted to speak about something, he would be silent for a time instead, because he foresaw that his words would be exploited and, instead of being a helpful correction, would become the cause of greater evil.

People felt safe following his advice. Discerning spiritual fathers, experienced ascetics, and bishops entrusted their spiritual progress to his discernment, for they became aware of God's will for them in the elder's presence. He was an experienced captain who saved souls from the waves and the reefs of this life, guiding many to salvation with his God-given discernment.

A Lover of Stillness

The elder's life was characterized by constant attempts to escape to the desert. One would say that he had been born with an insatiable desire for stillness that had never been extinguished. From a young age, he isolated himself, searching for stillness: he frequently climbed the mountain near his village and stayed in caves or scrambled up onto the rocks. Imitating the Lord, "he withdrew into the desert and prayed."[84] A life of stillness was what he wanted most, but, by God's providence, this desire was not realized for many years. Nevertheless, the many obstacles that blocked his way to stillness did not extinguish his longing—they only increased it.

His years of asceticism at Esphigmenou, Philotheou, and Stomio were really a preparation for stillness. In Sinai, he basked in stillness, enjoyed its fruits, and increased his spiritual wealth. He lived the angelic life, as though he were immaterial, and he adapted his life to the holy desert and felt its consolation. He lived the mysteries of God, experienced exalted spiritual states, and possessed unceasing prayer.

In a letter written at the Skete of Iveron, he explained, "I didn't just cut off my correspondence—I avoided seeing

84. Luke 5:16.

people. The further I got from the world's problems, the more I could help with the world's problems, because it isn't a human effort. The good Lord Himself will intervene in the world's problems, without violating free will."[85]

At the hermitage of the Holy Cross, where the flow of pilgrims was always increasing, the elder took appropriate measures to ensure stillness. He fenced off the area around the hermitage and again ceased corresponding. "I'm a monk of stillness," he wrote, "so my life doesn't make any sense when I'm writing letters. It makes sense when I'm always remembering and praying for the world. Now, in the winter, I have the stillness I need. In the summer, I don't, because of all the college students."

His great love would not allow him to live the events of Mount Tabor, indifferent to the suffering of others, and so he made a great effort to come out of this state and speak with people. Few understood what a sacrifice it was for him to leave the stillness he desired in order to concern himself with their problems.

This was his lifelong struggle: to live a life of stillness and also help others. And with discernment, the God-illumined elder, like the ancient warriors who fought with weapons in both hands, skillfully combined stillness and ministry, hesychasm and spiritual guidance. He made the most out of his stillness, and when circumstances and the will of God put him among others, he would open to them his spiritual storehouse. Like another Joseph, wisely distributing grain, he nourished the hungering people of God with what he had gathered in the desert.

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85. Dated May 8, 1966.

He managed to live a life of stillness in spite of the fact that he was visited by so many people that at times he was drowning in visitors. He was helped by his regimen of stillness, his experience, and the great discernment that he always used in handling everyone. In this way, he was helped spiritually and also consoled others.

"I can talk with everyone," he said. "I can spend time with them, but then I want to be by myself." His inner, deeper self was a lover of stillness. He added: "When someone can't live in the desert, he should try to create the conditions for stillness wherever it is that he is living. If we're careful to cut off our passions, then we'll be in the desert wherever we are. And now [in my final years] I'd like to live on Athos with the 'naked ascetics,' but can I?[86] 'The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'[87] At night and for three hours during the day I want to be by myself—I feel I have to be totally isolated."

He would spend the day comforting those in pain, but the night he wanted for stillness. "When I have to host someone overnight," he remarked, "I don't feel the stillness as much." In the summer, he would disappear into the woods for a few hours every day. He had cleared places where he could pray, and he built a small shelter out of ferns. He read the Psalter and prayed with his prayer-rope; and then he returned to his hermitage, where many souls waited to see him.

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86. According to the tradition of the Holy Mountain, there are seven (or, as some say, twelve) monks who live in the caves of Athos and pray for the whole world. When one of them dies, another takes his place, and thus the number remains constant. They are figuratively called "naked," because they wear old cassocks and attend to nothing but prayer.

87. Matt. 26:41.

Some might wonder what sort of a lover of silence the elder was, considering that he spent all day talking with people. It is just as Abba Poemen taught: a man may talk "from morning till night and yet he is truly silent; that is, he says nothing that is not profitable."[88]

In silence, he worshipped God; and, by talking with others, he led them to God. But as a friend and lover of silence, he always yearned for the desert. For this reason, in his final years, he repeatedly tried to withdraw to some deserted place, but he always encountered obstacles. When he visited Sinai, he wanted to stay for the stillness, and he felt the same way in the Holy Land. But, though he thought about Meteora* and other potential locations, there were always obstacles. In his last years, he begged God to bless him to live for two or three years in the desert before He took him from this life. He tried to settle in the interior of the Holy Mountain with one or two other fathers, but all his efforts failed. The will of God, as was made clear to him on two occasions, was for him to stay in his hermitage and help people.

This heavenly directive to receive people, combined with the deterioration of his health, prevented him from flying, free, to far-off deserts. He was content to live self-confined in his hermitage like a lone sparrow or a solitary turtle-dove.

He lived as if he were deep in the desert, because his heart had deserted the passions and acquired noetic stillness. He reached a state where he "could remain just the same whether among crowds or dwelling alone."[89] He managed

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88. *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, p. 171.

89. Nikiphoros the Monk, "On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart," *Philokalia*, Vol. 4, p. 197.

"to be every man's friend, but in [his] mind to remain alone."[90] He remained "steadfast under [the] assault [of turmoil] with a fearless heart, while living with men outwardly, but with God inwardly."[91]

From very early on, he could hear or not hear, and see or not see, as he liked. In the winter of 1959, a soldier visited him at Stomio. Children were playing loudly in the monastery's yard. Finding the elder sick in bed, the soldier said to him, "You're sick, father, but these kids aren't letting you practice silence."

"What kids?" asked the elder. "Oh—now I hear them. I wasn't paying attention to them." And the soldier realized that the elder, immersed in prayer, hadn't been able to hear the noise.

"I was traveling in the Holy Land," the elder recalled, "and the man who was driving me around asked me which road we should take. I said to him, 'Are we taking a world tour or something? Whichever's shorter.' As we drove along, he said to me, 'You see, elder—that's why I didn't want to come this way, because it took us by the nude beach.'

'To tell you the truth," I replied, "I didn't see anything. I just saw something like shadows moving.'"

When the elder was looking for a deserted place outside the Holy Mountain, he was shown a beautiful cave. The immediate area was quiet, but he was told that there was a lot of traffic noise from a road off in the distance. "That won't bother me," he replied. "I can hear it or not hear it, depending on what I want, and I can see the cars or not see them. What's

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90. Saint Isaac the Syrian, *Homily* 51, p. 247.

91. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent,* "To the Shepherd" 43, p. 237.

worse is the other noise—when people try to entangle me in this or that."

In the beginning, he taught, "[external] stillness, along with asceticism and unceasing prayer, brings inner stillness to the soul, and very quickly. After that, external turmoil doesn't bother you."[92]

From his experience with stillness, the elder said: "Stillness is prayer all by itself." He once commented that the monks at one monastery in the world were making progress, because they loved stillness and took refuge from distractions by going to live in hermitages from time to time.

Indeed, according to Abba Isaac, "stillness is the summit of perfection,"[93] and "the venerable work of stillness is a harbour of mysteries."[94]

Stillness is good, but one must struggle and do the works of stillness. "What will I get from [external] stillness," he remarked characteristically, "If I have a radio with me? The hermit must be or become good in order for the desert to help him.[95] Just like sweet fruit becomes sweeter in a dry place than in a wet one, but bitter fruit becomes more bitter, a good man will become better in the desert, but an impassioned man will become more impassioned. Some people want stillness. So they find a hermitage where there's stillness, and then they go there and they're indifferent about

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92. *Epistles*, p. 120 [Translation revised for clarity].

93. *Homily* 4, p. 38.

94. *Ibid* 65, p. 319.

95. And Saint John of the Ladder forbids the impassioned to live by themselves in stillness: "He who is still troubled by bad temper and conceit, by hypocrisy and remembrance of wrongs, should never dare to set foot on the way of stillness" (27.36, p. 203).

things" – that is, they fall into carelessness – "And every now and then they read a spiritual book."

He told the following story: "In the old days, when Vatopedi* monastery was idiorhythmic, two fathers agreed to go into the desert, and they got a hermitage. One was a struggler who kept vigil all night. The other slept, and was actually annoyed by his fellow ascetic's struggles. 'What are you doing all night long,' he said, 'that you can't be quiet? You read the Psalter, but you don't understand what it says: and by night before Thee – well, here you are before me, not letting me get any sleep.'[96] So it appears that one of them truly went to the desert for a better spiritual life, but the other actually went there for a better fleshly life and comforts."

"Do those who live in stillness" he asked emphatically, "develop silence [that is, stillness], or do they talk with their thoughts? Because, if they talk with their thoughts, then they're chattier than a chatterbox. With someone who talks idly, you can offer criticism, you can scold him, and slowly he'll improve. A 'hesychast,' on the other hand, has the idea that he's a lover of stillness, but he's really doing himself much harm. A lover of stillness has to have noetic prayer."

Noetic prayer is the purpose of stillness. As Abba Isaac teaches, it is "constant prayer" that "embraces all the labors of [stillness]."[97]

According to the elder, there are conditions that must be met before a person can go to the desert. One must be ei-

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96. The meaning has been slightly modified. In the Greek, the word used for "before" can also mean "against," allowing the father to make a pun: "You're against me – you won't let me sleep." – Trans.

97. *Homily* 37, p. 182.

ther a disciple of an elder or under obedience at a coenobitic monastery. A young monk once asked if he could go into the desert, and the elder deterred him, telling him, "You're not ready to live alone in stillness." He taught, "If a young monk goes off to live by himself in stillness, according his own will, without guidance, he'll never succeed, even if he's *not* possessed by a demon."

An Athonite monk was living by himself in his cell, and, lost in useless concerns, he couldn't find spiritual comfort or rest. "Just take the Philokalia and your prayer-rope," the elder advised him, "and go over there beyond the chestnut trees."

When he was asked how a monk could live in stillness on the Holy Mountain nowadays, the elder answered, "It's possible, when he lives in obscurity and doesn't have a lot of dealings with people from the world."

The elder helped fathers who met the conditions necessary for living the life of stillness. Thanks to him, many hermitages were populated and many sanctuaries of stillness founded.

The elder lived and transmitted the spirit of stillness. He had great expectations and many hopes for the life of stillness. "The revival of the Church," he believed, "will come from the life of stillness."

Watchfulness

If it is difficult to write about the elder in general, it is nearly impossible to relate his inner labors. "The heart," teaches Scripture, "is deceitful above all things, and desperately man, wicked: who can know it?"[98] Here we will briefly mention his watchfulness; that is, his attention or vigilance.

Even as a layman he was a watchful laborer, careful of the company he kept and of his thoughts and feelings. He practiced self-control every day. He trained himself not to look at women in the face. A female relative once complained to his mother that he didn't greet her or even acknowledge her—it was because his eyes and his mind were turned elsewhere. He didn't frequent the coffee shops, and he avoided worldly amusements. "One time," he recalled, "there was a party at a house, and I was asleep in the hayloft. I said my prayers, like in a manger, and I was full of joy."

"When I went to the monastery," he related, "I started off with a lot of prayers, but I wasn't paying very much attention to myself. A little time passed and I got to thinking, 'Something's not right.' Then I realized I was missing watchfulness—constant watch over myself. In the

98. Jer. 17:9. [OSB: Jer. 17:5.]

beginning, you need attention more than prayer.[99] Prayer doesn't help when there's no watchfulness. We have to be watchful all the time. We should observe our every movement. Observing ourselves—attention—is more helpful than prayer and study."

When all the monks would work together on a common project, the elder, in order to cultivate watchfulness, would work silently, off to the side. When he needed to travel from Katounakia to Daphni, he would wait for the boat by himself, at the rocks on the shore. While living at Panagouda, he traveled to Karyes only rarely; and, when he did, he preferred to take a narrow, unknown route at an unusual time, so he wouldn't run into others.

On the road, he held his prayer-rope and said the Jesus prayer, or he reviewed in his mind something he had read—"reading without a book," as he put it.

He did internal spiritual work, "the only kind," he would say, "that God rewards." His heart burned with the remembrance of God. His mind was clear, attentive, and easily translated from the things of this world to those of the next.

Once, two young men who were very close to some of the monks came at sunset to visit the elder at Panagouda. He had already closed the door and begun his prayer rule, but he received them anyway, and they sat in the guest area asking him various spiritual questions. He responded briefly, but his nous was elsewhere, captivated by God—he was like someone in ecstasy. He spoke to them, but he was

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99. Here, the elder is making a play on words. The Greek words for "attention" and "prayer" [προσοχή-προσευχή (prosohē-prosefhē)] sound very similar.—Trans.

living and thinking something else.

From experience and ever-watchful labor, his nous was able to repel impassioned thoughts easily and to transform them into something good and holy. Inside himself, he had created, as he put it, "a factory" that generated good thoughts. "A good thought," he taught, "has more power than a difficult ascetic feat. Our thoughts reveal our spiritual state." He spoke about the stages of spiritual progress as regards one's thoughts: "Someone who works on himself doesn't see errors in other people. The spiritual man sees everything clearly and well. In the beginning, you struggle not to judge. In the second stage, you try to put good thoughts against judgmental thoughts; and in the third stage you interpret everything in a good way. Love and humility come into it. When the soul's purified, it doesn't bother to have good or bad thoughts anymore. Bad thoughts don't even come to it. In other words, it sees anything that's blameworthy as good."

"The best way to face attacks of thoughts," he taught, "is contempt. You should treat them like they're not the least bit important. It's dangerous to talk with a thought—a hundred lawyers together couldn't beat one little demon."

He recommended that one avoid cultivating fantasies, because temptation will exploit them. The only exception, he taught, is when we want to chase away a sinful fantasy. Then we should bring to mind holy images such as the Judgment, the Crucifixion, and so on.

When the elder traveled by bus, and there was a lot of noise, he would chant softly, using the noise as the ison.[100]

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100. That is, the drone note that accompanies Byzantine chant melodies.—Trans.

When Elder Paisios was at the Iveron skete, there was an elder who would frequently visit him in order to talk. Father Paisios would listen to him, standing silently, but inside himself he would be saying the prayer. Eventually, the elder would grow tired of talking and leave. In this way, Father Paisios was able to avoid both interrupting his labor of watchfulness and causing offence to his brother.

Seeing the general state of affairs, he remarked, "It makes me sad that so many young monks haven't learned to work, to earn their own bread." They didn't, in other words, learn the basic monastic spiritual labors, which would spiritually feed them and enable them to thrive. One of these labors is watchfulness, which is extremely important and necessary for our salvation. But he knew how difficult the subtle work of watchfulness is for young and particularly sensitive monks. "A beginner who tries to do subtle work on himself," noted the elder with discernment, "will go crazy, like he's a novice accountant at a huge corporation." It's better, he taught, for a beginner to deal first with his major deficiencies and weaknesses.

The elder would emphasize the great value of watchfulness by means of examples: "Attention is needed. I see people who didn't pay attention at the beginning of their lives, and they're the same in their old age, even if they became monks. If someone wants to go somewhere—Karyes, let's say—and he's absent-minded, he'll take another road, and it'll lead him somewhere else without him realizing it. That's what happens in the spiritual life when we don't have watchfulness. We set out for one place, and unfortunately we end up somewhere else.... When there's no watchfulness, the first thing that happens is that a person becomes lax about

thoughts, and then the body and finally the whole person follows. He doesn't feel like doing anything—not handiwork, and not anything spiritual either. This is why we're lax: we don't have constant watchfulness."

One time, some seniors from the Athonite School asked him what they should watch out for most in their lives. "Pay attention to the little, everyday things," he answered.

"You sit there comfortably in your armchair, and you think that it's not bad or a sin; you say, 'It doesn't matter.' It doesn't matter if we eat a little more or if we ask for good food. It doesn't matter if we sleep a little bit more. It doesn't matter if I was a little short with my parents or someone else. This doesn't matter, that doesn't matter.... We justify all these little wrongs. But not paying attention to these small things will lead us to do even bigger wrongs—and then we'll say, 'it doesn't matter' about them too. We shouldn't let the body be lazy, because the body affects the spirit. We have to be vigilant."

Once, there was a young monk who would forget to say the Jesus prayer because he was distracted by ministering to pilgrims. He was discouraged, so the elder advised him as follows: "Always have a Bible open in your cell; and when you go in, take a look at it and do one small prayer-rope, saying the prayer so you don't lose your concentration." The elder himself had tried and tested all these things.

The elder's conscience had been fine-tuned and he didn't let anything weigh on it. It was not only sensitive to sin and able to reject it, but also sensitive to grace and able to receive it. "A monk," he taught, "more than anything, is a delicate conscience. Our conscience has to become as delicate as cigarette paper. Sensitivity is like the gold-leaf on

an icon. It's precious, but you have to be really careful with it—you barely touch it, and it rubs off. If you aren't sensitive, you'll always be living in a dry asceticism, no matter what you do. But you also need to be strong enough to handle that sensitivity, because otherwise you'll drown. Women are sensitive. But most of them lose it with their pettiness and their troubles, because they don't also have the strength they need."

If the elder didn't feel that his conscience was clear and at peace, he wouldn't begin his prayer and struggles. He tried not to hurt people. "If I hurt someone," he said, "I'd go to Athens and start knocking on doors until I found him. And when I found him, I'd make a prostration down to the ground, and I'd say to him, 'Forgive me for hurting you, my brother.' I wouldn't be able to pray until after I'd done that."

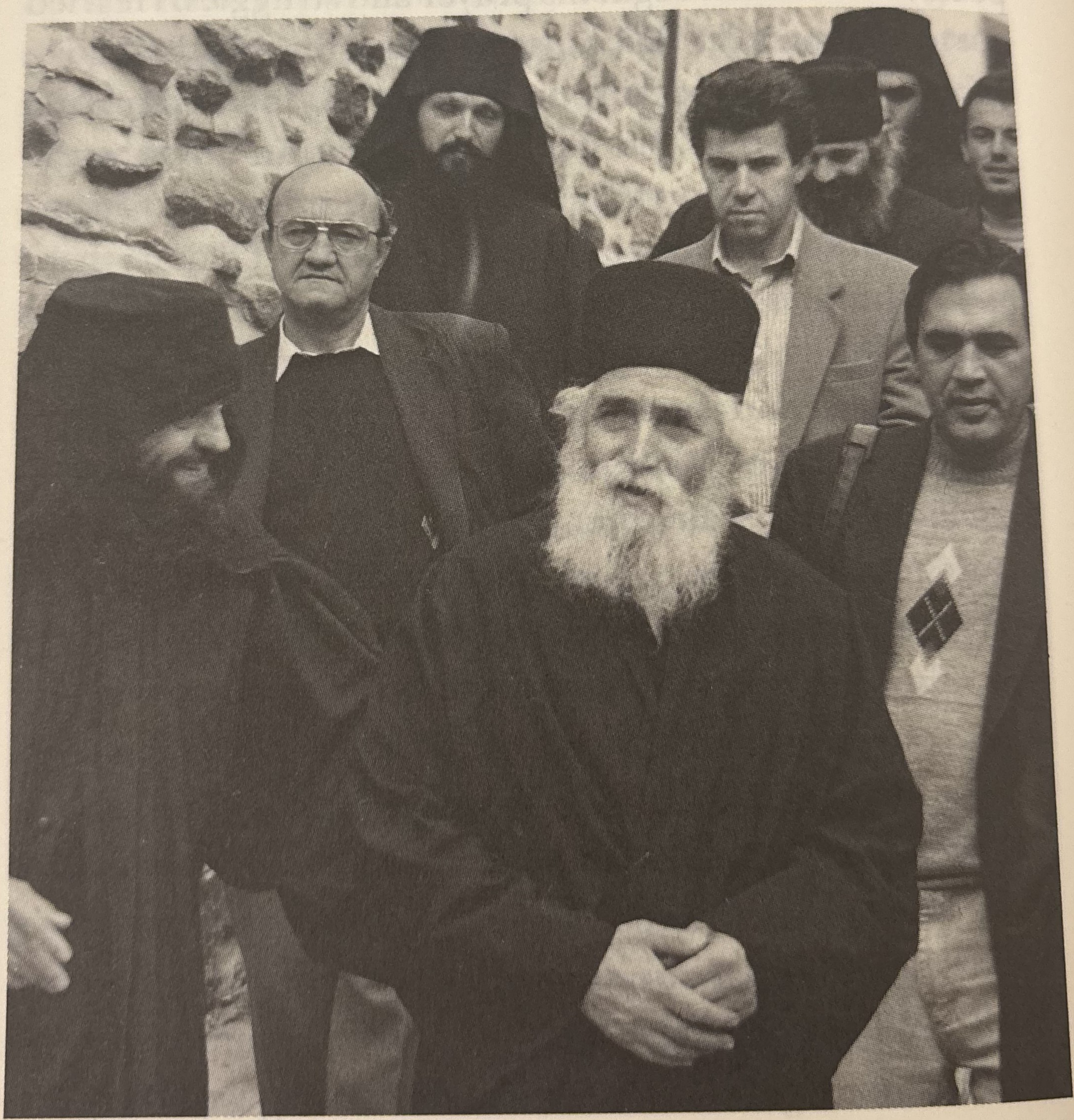
Watchfulness is always necessary for a monk. "In the beginning," the elder taught, "you need watchfulness to collect the nous; and then you need it to keep your nous from falling into error." Without this, the attacks of the thoughts turn into passions, and then, as the elder put it, "you end up like a supermarket with passions for sale."

There was one point he particularly emphasized; namely, that "if we don't get a hold of ourselves"—that is, watch and accuse ourselves—we'll never improve, even if we live for a thousand years. Instead, we'll have a false picture of ourselves, and at the Day of Judgment we'll have ridiculous ideas about how God ought to judge us.

For every one of our actions, we have to ask ourselves: "Well, am I comfortable with this? Is God comfortable with this?" If we forget to do that, the next thing we'll forget is God.

Let's turn our whole selves to Christ, and let's think about how Christ will view everything we do, even our smallest action – not how it'll look to other people.

The elder valued watchfulness so much that he left it as an inheritance for others. When a monk asked him, before his repose, what it was he should pay the most attention to, the elder replied, "Reverence and attention to yourself."



Elder Paisios on his last visit to Koutloumousiou Monastery, Nov. 1993.

His Rule of Prayer

The elder's foremost struggle in this life was the acquisition of prayer. He believed that it was his job to pray: that this was his service to the Church. All his other ascetic endeavors were meant to assist him in prayer. According to Saint Isaac the Syrian, this is a work worthy of praise: "Blessed is the man who... has translated all his physical activity into the work of prayer."[101]

The elder was experienced in all the ways of prayer. As a layman, he read the divine services and said the Jesus prayer. As a young monk, he participated without fail in the common worship of the monastery, thoroughly learning the typicon and the order of the services. At the monastery in Stomio, he neglected nothing called for by the typicon: the services that he performed there lasted five hours daily, not including his own personal prayer rule.

He counseled a young monk who had gone to a hermitage alone, zealously giving himself over to the Jesus prayer, to read a little from the divine services as well. Otherwise, the elder warned, it wouldn't be long before just seeing his prayer-rope would make the monk shudder. Unfortunately, this, along with other unhappy events, is exactly what ended up happening. The Jesus prayer is

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101. *Homily* 4, p. 38.

hearty, substantial food, but some people need milk as well.

The elder laid great emphasis on the disposition of the nous. Drawing on his vast experience, he taught others how to take advantage of their free time for prayer: "If we want the spiritual life to come easily, we shouldn't pressure ourselves. We should ask our selves: 'Do you want to read the service now? How about the Psalter? What about taking a walk and saying the prayer, or doing the service of supplication and making prostrations?' That way, we won't get worn out, because we'll be doing everything with a good disposition.

"When our soul's not in a good mood and we can't make prostrations, we should just say the Jesus prayer standing, or read or pray or do whatever we find appealing. When a child's got no appetite, you can't force him to eat. You give him whatever he wants. But afterwards, when he's feeling better, you can feed him broccoli. That's how it is with the soul. The whole heart has to participate in prayer. Spiritual labors need to come from the heart. You can only receive something in a spiritual way if you give something in a spiritual way and you can't do that without sacrifice."

If you're going to pray, you have to get ready. After all, prayer is communication with God and communion with God. When you pray, you receive God's grace in a unique way. Just like when you receive the Pearl [Christ's Body and Blood] in Holy Communion—when you commune by praying, you receive the divine flame.

Reading spiritual books collects and concentrates the nous, warms the heart, and prepares one's whole person for prayer. "At night, [after we get up,]" the elder would say, "before we start our prayer-rule, we don't have to read, be-

cause the mind is clear and rested."

"You have to study the Gospel," he taught, "for the sanctification of the soul, even if you don't completely understand what it means. We should read meaty books, like Abba Isaac the Syrian. You can read just one sentence of Abba Isaac, and it's got enough spiritual vitamins to last for a week or a month.

"I see a lot of people who read, and they feel some kind of satisfaction; but what they're reading doesn't touch them, and nothing sticks with them. The words just wash over them in a superficial way—Abba Isaac says that the water in a painting can't quench your thirst. I remember that I would read just a little of the fathers, but I kept notes and compared myself with them, and I saw how far away from them I was. It was like looking at myself in a mirror. Usually, young people read books about theology. What can I say? It's like having a big pot of vegetables with one or two little pieces of meat. That's how theology is today. It's only once in a while that you find anything from the holy fathers."

Chanting was a prominent element of the elder's life. Though he knew that it was an imperfect form of prayer,[102] the elder loved it, and he would help chant during the vigils and liturgies served at the hermitage.

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102. "Prayer differs from psalmody," states Saint Symeon the New Theologian, "just as the full-grown man differs from the adolescent"—where by "prayer" the Saint refers to noetic prayer, prayer "in true purity" (*Philokalia*, vol. 4, pp. 74–75). Similarly, Saint Gregory of Sinai advises hesychasts as follows: "If you are seated and you see that prayer is continuously active in your heart, do not abandon it and get up to psalmodize until in God's good time it leaves you of its own accord. Otherwise, abandoning the interior presence of God, you will address yourself to Him from without, thus passing from a higher to a lower state..." (p. 278).—eds.

He was given the opportunity to study Byzantine music, but he declined. All the same, he knew how to chant from experience, and indeed he chanted quite well, with sweetness, reverence, and enthusiasm. He had a sense for music. He would sway back and forth, becoming entirely immersed in God. His voice emerged from his heart and carried the listener away into heaven, and one had the impression that he was standing before God. The elder had a particular love for certain hymns, which he learned by heart.[103] "Chanting the slower arrangements," he said, "gives the vigil splendor and majesty."

"When we feel upset," advised the elder, "we should chant. Chanting drives away the devil, because it's prayer, and at the same time it's contempt for the temptor. We shouldn't fight blasphemous thoughts with the Jesus prayer—that just opens up a new front with the devil, and he attacks us even more. We ought to chant hymns instead, and, when the devil sees us treating [his suggestions] with disdain, he'll get so angry he'll go to pieces."

Besides chanting, the elder continually glorified God with praise and thanksgiving. "Glory to Thee, O God; glory to Thee!" he would repeatedly say from his heart as from an overflowing wellspring of gratitude to the Lord. "It's better to avoid using our own words for prayer," he advised, "unless it's a sudden outpouring from your heart."

He was at peace keeping vigil alone in his cell, but when

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103. Among them were the "Dynamis" of Nileos, Papanikolaou's "It Is Truly Meet" in the eighth mode, Phokaeos's Cherubic Hymn in the fourth mode, "O Give Thanks unto the Lord," "From My Youth Up," the slow version of "God Is the Lord," the communion hymns in the second mode, the slow versions of the prosomoia, and the dogmatic theotokia.

he took part in a common vigil, he would chant along with the others. Sometimes, though, he followed along in silence, and then when he would enter deep within himself saying the Jesus prayer, he would be both present and absent. He did not measure prayer by length of time or quantity of hymns or prayers. He was mainly concerned that prayer be pure, that it reach God, and that it bear fruit. "The other kind of prayer," he would say, "we do just to get through the night, so that we can say that we've kept vigil for so many hours."

Most of all, the elder loved and cultivated the Jesus prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me," which he had first learned as a boy from his mother. From his time at Sinai onwards, with a few exceptions, the prayer took the place of the daily services. It became for him his nourishment, his delight, and his every breath. He reached a state of being in which his nous would become immersed in the prayer, such that it would continue even while he slept.

He was determined that his unceasing prayer not be interrupted. He said the prayer while he did his handiwork, on the road, and in the presence of others: everywhere and at all times. In the midst of his handiwork, he would set aside what he was doing, retreat to a quiet place and kneel, becoming immersed in the prayer until the voice of a visitor would bring him back. He usually prayed kneeling, with his hands and head affixed to the ground. His knees suffered from the countless hours he spent like this, such that he could hardly walk downhill.

It is impossible to speak of the elder's prayer, for his spiritual journeys are hidden and indescribable. How can we describe his noetic ascents, the secret flights of his nous,

when we are totally ignorant of such things? What little can be said sheds but dim light on his spiritual labor, and it cannot convey with any precision his spiritual state and stature.

"At your age," he once told a new monk, "every night was a spiritual festival for me." Here, he spoke of nightly prayer, which is, as we read in Abba Isaac, "a work filled with delight."[104]

He was able quickly and easily to turn his mind to prayer, to lose touch with his environment, and to become, in the words of Saint Symeon the New Theologian, as "one who is not." Even when he would travel by car, or when he was in company, he would say the prayer within himself, wholly absorbed in God, as eyewitnesses have testified, and becoming one with Him. One time, when he was kneeling at prayer in the forest, a scorpion bit him, yet he did not interrupt his prayer.

When the elder was largely unknown and still quite young, Hieromonk Athanasios of Iveron monastery, a learned and virtuous man of prominence and renown on the Holy Mountain, made a request of the blessed Father Athanasios of Stavronikita. "When I die," he said, "tell Father Paisios to pray for me and to grab the end of the Panagia's robe and shout, "Athanasios, Athanasios!'"

The elder considered it natural for a monk to give himself

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104. "Another [of the holy fathers] said, 'Choose for yourself a work filled with delight: constant night-vigil, whereby all the Fathers divested themselves of the old man and were accounted worthy of the renewal of the intellect [nous]. During those hours the soul experiences that immortal life, and by means of this experience she puts off the vesture of darkness and receives the Holy Spirit'" (*Homily* 65, p. 321).

over to the Jesus prayer. Once, a young monk told the elder that his throat hurt when he read the services alone. Encouraging him to take up the Jesus prayer, the elder replied, "We have the prayer-rope too."

"The name of Christ," he taught, "is all-powerful. The prayer is a fearsome weapon against the devil. First we should confess to God, after saying everything to our elder, and then we can start the prayer of the heart. That way, we'll make a good start every day.

"The prayer should be said noetically [that is, within the nous] instead of aloud—that's why it's called noetic prayer. You shouldn't say it in a rush—a hundred–knot prayer-rope should take at least a minute and a half. Otherwise, we won't feel the prayer, the same way we can't taste our food if we eat it too quickly. But we shouldn't say it too slowly, either."

"What helps someone say the prayer?" the elder was once asked. He answered, "What enables us to say the prayer with eager goodness, instead of mechanically, is a feeling of our sinfulness and of gratitude for God's gifts. Eventually, we get used to it. When we know ourselves and think about how ungrateful we are, we'll want to say the prayer. When we've been saying the prayer in our sleep, and then we wake up and keep going with it—that's when it's spiritual springtime."

He wanted the prayer to be accompanied by asceticism. He considered the external elements spoken of by the fathers of the Philokalia, such as a small stool, darkness ("I light a candle and pray," he would say), the inclination of the head, one's breathing, and so on, to be nothing more than supports. If these aspects of prayer are overemphasized, they can cause psychosomatic harm or lead a person

into delusion. He accepted the use of breathing methods associated with the Jesus prayer when they were joined to it in a natural rather than an artificial manner.

He pointed out the dangers of error in saying the prayer, but he also stressed its intended end: "It's become fashionable to say the Jesus prayer. Some people think the prayer is about nirvana, and they sit saying it without thinking about anything else, to calm down. They try to pray, and they get a headache. They say the prayer like someone's wound them up. What are we—clocks? Tick-tock, tick-tock .... That's not how to put off the old man. We have to say the prayer with self-awareness. It matters a lot to Christ that we realize what we've done wrong—that's something He asks us to do. Only, let's not lose our hope.

"We're not trying to pray without ceasing; we're trying to put off the old man. First we have to turn inward, toward the inner man, so we can know ourselves. We have to struggle to get away from the passions; and, as we see our passions, we have to ask for God's help. That way, unceasing prayer will become a part of us. We shouldn't try to acquire the prayer mechanically.

"We shouldn't let ourselves get tired of saying the prayer. Christ lets us talk with Him all the time, and we don't care? No matter how much you talk with Christ, you never regret it."

After having tested many different ways of life, trying to put into practice what he had read in the ascetic literature and been taught by experienced elders, Elder Paisios settled on a particular typicon, or rule of life. He would adjust it depending on his strength, his age, the free time he had, and

where he was practicing asceticism. "A monk," he said, "has to live according to a monastic typicon. Every ten years he has to reexamine how strong he is and pick the asceticism that's appropriate. When he's young, he needs to sleep more than he'll need to when he gets old, but he doesn't need to stop to rest as much. When he gets old, it's the opposite. Habit has a lot of power. When your body's gotten used to something, it'll want it even if it doesn't need it."

His rule of prayer was, more or less, the following: At three in the afternoon he said Ninth Hour and vespers,[105] and then he ate something. Next, he said Compline and prayed with his prayer-rope for several hours, and afterward he rested. Sometime before midnight, he would wake up, perform his prayer rule, and then do the services on his prayer-rope. When he finished, he would rest a bit; and then, with the morning light, he would resume his spiritual duties. If he was undistracted by visitors, he would say each of the hours at its appointed time, doing handiwork and saying the Jesus prayer in between.

Once he did something different for a time—he rested some at sunset, kept vigil all through the night, and then rested again a bit in the morning, taking no rest during the afternoon.

It is not possible to describe the elder's typicon as a young ascetic in the Sinai desert. In the words of the *Ladder*, "His whole life was unceasing prayer and unexampled love for God,"[106] and he performed his many hours of handiwork without tiring. Having no contact with others, he was en-

105. That is, in Byzantine time, at the ninth hour.

106. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, p. xxxvi.

tirely without cares and undistracted.

At Holy Cross, he read only the Six Psalms, the canon of the saint from *the Menaion**, and *the Theotokarion** of Saint Nikodemos in the afternoon. Everything else, he did on the prayer-rope. At Panagouda, he prayed three three-hundred-knot prayer-ropes to Christ, one to the Mother of God, one to the Forerunner, one to the Saint of the day and one to his own Saint. Afterwards, he repeated this on behalf of the living and then again a third time on behalf of the reposed, as well as praying for people in special circumstances.

At the end of his life, in spite of the many pilgrims who occupied his time throughout the day, he prayed more than forty three-hundred-knot prayer-ropes, in addition to his own rule of prayer and the services.

He divided the Psalter by three, reading one part each day. Saint Arsenios had divided the psalms into groups, each group corresponding to a certain category of people he would commemorate; and Father Paisios followed his example. Doing this, he was able to read six or seven sections[107] of the Psalter in a row without becoming tired of it.

Each year during Holy Week, he would read the Gospel accounts of the Passion, so as to participate more fully in the Passion of Christ. From the arrest of Christ until His taking down from the Cross – that is, from Holy Thursday evening until Holy Friday afternoon – the elder neither sat, nor slept, nor ate. Indeed, he said that it is better for someone to force himself to not eat on Holy Thursday and Holy Friday than on the first three days of Great Lent. He would only sip a little vinegar, in order to remember the vinegar tasted by the

107. That is, kathismata. – Trans.

Master. During these solemn days, the elder would stay sequestered in his cell, not opening his door to anyone. He would not have the heart to chant. Toward the end, during Holy Week at Panagouda, he said, "This is the first time I felt myself in a state like this."

The elder was an exacting monk who zealously observed his rule, not violating it without good reason. "Four people put together," he used to say, "couldn't drag me away from my prayer rule." Even when he was so ill that he couldn't stand, he wouldn't set aside his rule. He thought that the debt from not carrying out one's monastic duties caused great spiritual harm. "When that day comes," he once remarked, "I'll be ...," and as his voice trailed off he shook his head, indicating what a poor condition he'd have come to.

In the last years of his life, the number of his visitors had increased so much that he couldn't say vespers at the appropriate time. "So I don't miss the service," he would say, "I do it in the morning on my prayer-rope, and I sing 'O Gladsome Light' when the sun's about to set."

At the same time, the elder was entirely free—when it was needful, he sacrificed everything for the sake of love. At such times he would keep vigil, not with prayer, but by co-suffering with and consoling afflicted souls; for God wants "mercy, and not sacrifice."[108]

From the following excerpts from a letter to a spiritual child one can see, in part, the rule of prayer kept by the

108. Matt. 9:13. ["Visit the sick," Saint Symeon the New Theologian counsels monastics, "console the distressed, and do not make your longing for prayer a pretext for turning away from anyone who asks for your help; for love is greater than prayer" (*Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 58).—eds.]

elder: "When it comes to the schedule you wrote me about, if you have the chance, try this for a little while: At sunrise, start the First Hour, and leave fifteen minutes for the service. Then take another fifteen minutes for prostrations and praying on your prayer-rope, for the little children—'every man that cometh into the world'[109]—to be kept pure in the world, and also for all those who live as virgins. That includes us. Then sit down and finish the First Hour by saying the prayer for another thirty minutes—all together, you'll have done one full hour after sunrise. Then there are two hours free for spiritual activities, like reading, or prayer (if you want), or chanting. By 'free,' I mean the soul is welcome to do whatever spiritual activity it wants or to do some handiwork.

"Afterwards, do the Third Hour like the First, but dedicating it to the clergy, and to the nations, for them to come to the knowledge of the truth. I don't think it's a sin to say, 'O Lord, who didst send down Thy Most-holy Spirit ...' outside of Lent.[110] After the Third Hour, do the same thing as before: two hours free for spiritual activities or work you have to do. Then do the Sixth Hour in the same way, dedicating it to the world, for the good Lord to give people repentance. Again, the same as before for two hours, or take a rest, until the Ninth Hour. Then do the Ninth Hour like the others, dedicating it to the reposed, and then do vespers.

"I won't say anything about food, because that's some-

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109. John 1:9. The phrase is contained in one of the prayers of the First Hour.—eds.

110. "O Lord, who at the third hour didst send down upon thine apostles thy Holy Spirit: Take not the same from us, O good one, but renew him in us who pray unto thee" (*Liturgikon*, p. 183). In Athonite usage, as in the Russian typicon, this prayer forms part of the Third Hour only during Lent.—eds.

thing you'll figure out yourself, depending on what you can handle. But when there isn't a war, don't let yourself get to the point where you're faint and dizzy. That way, you'll have a clear mind to fight better. When someone starts the spiritual life, the struggle is with the thoughts, and his nous needs help for him to find the truth. But when he finds the truth, Who is Christ, he doesn't need reasoning anymore. It's the same for someone who's spiritually advanced: he doesn't need to have that kind of clarity, because he goes out of himself. He escapes the earth's gravity, and it isn't the physical sun, the creation, that enlightens him—it's the Creator Himself.

"After vespers and compline, aim to do three hours of prayer after sunset. Or, spend three hours on Compline and your rule of prayer together. This is the best time of day for prayer. Then sleep for six hours and do Midnight Office and matins. You can read parts of the services and then say the Jesus prayer. So you don't have to fuss with looking at the clock or counting prayer-ropes, set an alarm to go off after however many hours you want to pray.

"Try to do even just a fifth of what I'm writing here. That way, you won't be filled with anxiety, and you won't end up the way some poor little calves do. If people make things hard for them when the yoking is getting started, then when the calves see the yoke and figure out that they want to put it on them, they take off running."

From this rule of prayer we can see the spirit of the elder's rule: a monk is to occupy himself with plenty of spiritual activity throughout the day, but to do so with ease and eagerness.

To another one of his disciples, who also lived the ascetic

life alone, the elder gave the following typicon. It lays out other details of the monastic rule and vigil:

1. "Monastic typicon

At the equinox (in March and September):[111]

3 p.m. (9 p.m., Byzantine time): Ninth Hour and vespers

4 p.m.: Supper, except for Monday, Wednesday, and Friday

Sunset: Compline

3 a.m.: Rise

3–4 a.m.: Prayer-rule

4 a.m.: Divine Service

11 a.m.: Meal (on [feast] days that call for it)

11–3 p.m.: Tasks and handiwork

2. "Monastic Rule of Prayer

1. A three-hundred–knot prayer-rope in prayer to the Lord, making the sign of the Cross and small prostrations [with each prayer] until your hand touches your knee. It's not bad if you bend your knees a bit. It helps you to not tire out your knees so much, and to kindle awe and reverence, since by kneeling we show our worship of God.

2. A one-hundred–knot prayer-rope to the Theotokos ("Most Holy Theotokos, save me") with small prostrations and the sign of the Cross, as before.

3. Glory... both now... [Alleluia (3) Glory to Thee, O God] (3), with three full prostrations.

4. The fiftieth psalm ("Have mercy on me, O God...") in a

111. That is to say, this is the basic schedule, to be adjusted as sunset occurs earlier or later.—eds.

low voice with full prostrations throughout the psalm.
5. Hymns to the Theotokos, such as "All Those Who With Faith Flee Unto Thee" and "Unto Thee Do I Commit My Every Hope," with full prostrations.
6. "Unto Thee glory is due, O Lord our God...." Doxology, in a low voice, with full prostrations.
7. "It Is Truly Meet," with full prostrations.
8. Glory... both now... [Alleluia (3) Glory to Thee, O God] (3), with three full prostrations.

There can be a few prostrations or a lot, depending on each person's inclination.

This is the first part. Then we repeat it, saying, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on Thy servants" and "Most Holy Theotokos, save servants." We offer up prayer for the world. We can also commemorate particular people who have special needs.

Then we repeat what we've done a third time, saying, "Grant rest, O Lord, to the souls of Thy servants." "Most Holy Theotokos, help thy servants." We can also commemorate the names of those in need.

At the end, we pray to the Saint of the monastery with a one-hundred–knot prayer-rope. Then we can read the service and rest a bit.

Before a monk goes to sleep, he should cross his hands on his chest and say the hymns from the funeral service, so he'll have the remembrance of death.

The rule of prayer for a monk of the Great Schema is three hundred prostrations and twelve one-hundred-knot prayer-ropes. For a rasophore monk ([or] a monk of the Small Schema), the rule is one hundred and fifty prostrations and twelve prayer-ropes, and for the novice the rule is

sixty prostrations and six prayer-ropes.

3. *"Rule of prayer for the vigil using a prayer-rope*[112]

1. Glory to Thee, O God... (three-hundred–knot prayer-rope) (3)
Rejoice, O Bride Unwedded... (1)
2. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me (3)
Most Holy Theotokos... (1)
3.Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me (for the fathers) (3)
Most Holy Theotokos... (for the fathers) (1)
4. Cross of Christ... (3)
5. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me (for the reposed) (3)
Most Holy Theotokos... (for the reposed) (1)
"The reading of supplicatory services
6. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me (for benefactors) (3)
Most Holy Theotokos... (for benefactors) (1)
7. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me (for the world) (3)
Most Holy Theotokos... (for the world) (1)
8. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me (for the sick) (3)
Most Holy Theotokos... (for the sick) (1)
9. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me (for the brotherhood) (3)
Most Holy Theotokos... (for the brotherhood) (1)

For the reposed, and to saints toward whom we have a

112. The numbers in parentheses denote three-hundred–knot prayer-ropes.

particular reverence."

The rule, as we can see, includes certain general categories of worship, such as prostrations, doxology, and prayer for both the living and reposed.

In this rule, we see the elder's freedom: he was not constrained by the typicon or by rules of prayer. He provided a yardstick to help the monk, but he didn't go into details about food and sleep, allowing him to make decisions about those matters according to his strength and his eagerness for struggle. He didn't impose his own exalted life on others. Everyone cannot fit into the same mold.

In closing, we present a typicon for vigils that the elder sent to a women's monastery in the last years of his life. It was to be used for the sisters' individual vigils, in their cells. Prayer for world is of paramount importance in this typicon.

"Order of the Vigil:

The personal prayer-rule can be done at the beginning or at the end of the vigil, depending on preference.

We begin with a little reading.

Afterwards, we pray with a prayer-rope, saying:

"Glory to Thee, O our God, Glory to Thee" (one three-hundred–knot prayer-rope) and "Rejoice, O Bride Unwedded" (one one-hundred–knot prayer-rope).

Glory... both now...

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, glory to Thee, O God (3).

Lord have mercy (3). Glory... both now...

Psalm Fifty.

"Under thy compassion..."[113]
Doxology and "It is truly meet."
(All of these are done with prostrations.)

Then, we continue:

"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me" (one three-hundred–knot prayer-rope) and "Most Holy Theotokos, save me" (one one-hundred–knot prayer-rope).

Then we do the Supplication Service to the Theotokos (optional).

Then, "Cross of Christ, save us by thy power" (one one-hundred–knot prayer-rope); "Baptizer of Christ, intercede for me," for repentance (one one-hundred–knot prayer-rope) "Holy [Apostle] of Christ, intercede for me," to Saint John the Theologian, for love (one one-hundred–knot prayer-rope); and "Saint of God, intercede for me," to Saint Arsenios, for health (one one-hundred–knot prayer-rope).

Then, the following petitions:

For the elders:

"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on Thy servants" (one three-hundred–knot prayer-rope) and "Most Holy Theotokos, save thy servants" (one one-hundred–knot prayer-rope).

For the sisterhood:

"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us" (one three-hun-

113. "Under thy compassion do we flee, O Theotokos; disdain not our prayers in times of affliction; but do thou rescue us from perils, O only pure one, O only blessed one" (*Great Horologion*, p. 233). The prayer is used in the service of Small Compline.—eds.

dred–knot prayer-rope) and "Most Holy Theotokos, save us" (one one-hundred–knot prayer-rope).

For the reposed:

"Lord Jesus Christ, grant rest to Thy servants" (one three-hundred–knot prayer-rope) and "Most Holy Theotokos, grant rest to thy servants" (one one-hundred–knot prayer-rope).

For benefactors:

"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on Thy servants" (one three-hundred–knot prayer-rope) and "Most Holy Theotokos, save thy servants" (one one-hundred–knot prayer-rope).

Three prayer-ropes of three-hundred knots each, with the following general petitions:

My God, do not abandon Your servants who live far from the Church: let Your love take action and bring them all close to You.[114]

Remember, Lord, Your servants who suffer from cancer.

Remember, Lord, Your servants who suffer from severe and minor illnesses.

Remember, Lord, Your servants who suffer from physical disabilities.

Remember, Lord, Your servants who suffer from psychological disabilities.

Remember, Lord, rulers (presidents, government min-

114. As we have seen, the elder opposed the translation of the Church's liturgical texts into Modern Greek. However, in his extemporaneous prayer and (as here) in prayers he himself composed, he used simple, plain Modern Greek. The present translation retains that distinction by rendering prayer of the latter sort in English of a similar style. – Trans.

isters ...) and help them to rule in a Christian way.

Remember, Lord, children who come from troubled families.

Remember, Lord, troubled and divorced families.

Remember, Lord, all the world's orphans, everyone in pain and suffering injustice, and widows and widowers.

Remember, Lord, everyone in prison, anarchists,[115] drug-addicts, murderers, wrongdoers, and thieves: enlighten them and help them to reform.

Remember, Lord, all immigrants.

Remember, Lord, all those who travel by sea, land, and air, and protect them.

Remember, Lord, our Church, the clergy and the faithful.

Remember, Lord, all of the monastic brotherhoods and sisterhoods, the elders and mothers, and all of the Athonite fathers.

Remember, Lord, Your servants living in wartime.

Remember, Lord, Your servants [in wartime] who are forced to flee to the mountains and fields.

Remember, Lord, Your servants who are in need, like hunted little birds.

Remember, Lord, Thy servants who have left their homes and their work and are beset by difficulties.

Remember, Lord, the poor, the homeless, and refugees.

Remember, Lord, all the nations: hold them in Your embrace, cover them with Your holy protection, and guard

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115. The elder classed anarchists with criminals presumably because of the many acts of mass violence and terrorism carried out by self-styled anarchists in Greece.—eds.

them from every evil and from war. And remember our beloved Greece: keep it in Your embrace day and night, cover it with Your holy protection, and guard it from every evil and from war.

Remember, Lord, families that are afflicted, abandoned, wronged, and being tried, and send them Your rich mercy.

Remember, Lord, Your servants who suffer from mental and physical problems of every kind.

Remember, Lord, Your servants who have asked for our prayers.

The reposed can't be helped by themselves: they are waiting for help from us, the way people in prison do.

There are no breaks scheduled during the vigil; whoever wants to can take one."

The elder wanted monastics who lived alone to have a typicon, a rule of life and prayer, in order to help them in their struggles. "In your cell, prepare yourself for your obedience," that is, work, "and through your work prepare yourself for your cell. This way, you'll always be calm and joyful. When you're absent-minded, your mind wanders. It helps to have a schedule from morning on, so as not to have conflict from thoughts."

He didn't give a rule to people for whom he wasn't spiritually responsible and those whose progress he wasn't able to follow. Once, for example, a college student asked the elder to give him a rule of prayer. "I can't," the elder responded, "because when a doctor writes a prescription for a patient, he's got to be nearby so he can observe him and care for him." And so he limited himself to giving him a few general

counsels for the spiritual life.

He had infinite respect for everything laid down by the holy fathers. To someone who was arbitrarily changing the order of the services, he said, "Okay, the world won't end if we change something; but we're putting ourselves above the holy fathers."

The elder observed the typicon of the Church respectfully and reverently, and it helped him to form a spiritual rule and find what is most essential: to reside in unceasing prayer, which unites us to God.

The Elder at the Holy Convent
of Saint John the Forerunner in the village of Metamorphosis.

Dispassion

"We come to the monastery to become perfect," the elder said. "The monastic life is the perfect life, and we drag it down with the way we live." He pursued this perfect life, giving his blood and sweat for it.

The elder's constant, painstaking quest to keep the commandments perfectly is worthy of great admiration. Using the virtues as building blocks, he succeeded in making himself into a "house of dispassion."[116] All the virtues were included in his treasury of dispassion, for the crown of dispassion is made from every kind of flower. If even one flower is missing, dispassion is not complete. As Saint Peter of Damascus writes, "Dispassion is the union of many virtues."[117]

The elder no longer struggled against the passions, because he had subdued them; rather, his activity was to constantly enrich himself with the virtues. His store of spiritual honey nourished many, sweetening their lives.

The elder's dispassion was also revealed by his excep-

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116. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 26.19, p. 165.

117. "Dispassion is not a single virtue, but a name for all the virtues. A man is not merely one limb, for it is the many limbs of the body that constitute a man; and not merely the limbs, but the limbs together with the soul. Similarly, dispassion is the union of many virtues, while the place of the soul is taken by the Holy Spirit" (*Philokalia*, vol. 3, p. 252).

tional purity.[118] "The Lord," he once confided to someone, "guards me from carnal sins," but his purity went beyond that, to the point that he never gave in even to carnal thoughts. Just the memory of being attacked, many years in the past, by a disgraceful thought would make him turn red with embarrassment like a child. At the beginning, when he was tempted in his sleep by a demonic fantasy, he would fight hard, waking instantly. But eventually, when temptations like that would strike, he would be totally unmoved.[119] Since he had come to view the world dispassionately, the sight of female beauty neither moved nor scandalized him.[120] The few cases of carnal warfare he did report were caused by judgmental or proud thoughts.

His unwavering spiritual state and the peace and fullness of grace that he felt are the marks of a person released from the passions and filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit.[121] He passed through the sea of the passions, and he took the Sabbath rest from every sin both in deed and in the mind through impassioned thoughts. Simply put, he became unmoved by the passions.[122]

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118. "Purity is worthy of such great and high praise that certain of the Fathers ventured to call it freedom from passion" (*Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 15.66, p. 114).

119. "A true sign of purity is to be unmoved by dreams during sleep" (*Ibid*, 15.13, p. 105).

120. Saint Maximos the Confessor writes, "There are three main inner states characterizing the life of the monk. The first consists in not sinning in actions; the second in not allowing the soul to dally with impassioned thoughts; the third in being able to contemplate dispassionately in the mind the forms of women and of those who have given one offence" (*Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 80).

121. "Dispassion," writes Saint Maximos, "is a peaceful condition of the soul in which the soul is not easily moved to evil" (*Ibid*, vol. 2, p. 56).

122. See Saint Maximos, "Two Hundred Texts on Theology and the Incar-

The elder subdued and purified his flesh with his great asceticism. He rested by taking on more work, and he sought out suffering. He avoided pleasure, which leads us to the passions: he didn't even look for spiritual pleasure in prayer. "If you do not long for bodily pleasure," writes Saint Maximos the Confessor, "and have not the slightest fear of pain, you have attained dispassion."[123]

To the elder, his gifts were a cause for humility and greater struggle.[124] He was humble-minded: when he was praised he didn't boast, and when he was slandered he didn't despair. He was in a state of dispassion because he had the remembrance of God.[125] He was always thinking about God, talking about God with others, or praying to God. His nous, seeking to transcend this world's reality, was taken up into divine vision, and it wasn't troubled by the attacks of thoughts.[126] His purified nous could see ahead to the age to come. The elder, clothed in the dying that brings life, spoke about the God-given fragrance of eternal life and the sweetness of divine eros.

According to Saint Maximos the Confessor, from dispassion, perfect love is born: "The acquisition of

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nate Dispensation of the Son of God," *Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 114–163.

123. *Ibid*, p. 174.

124. "An abundance of humility is the daughter of dispassion" (*Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 26.65, p. 197).

125. "Dispassion comes from the memory of God" (*Hagioi Kallistos kai Ignatios Xanthopouloi*, "*Peri tōn hairoumenōn hesyxōs Bionai*", [Saints Kallistos and Ignatius Xanthopouloi, "On those who would like to live a life of stillness"] *Philokalia*, in Greek, vol. 5, p. 282).

126. Saint Maximos the Confessor writes, "When during prayer no conceptual image of anything worldly disturbs your intellect [nous], then know that you are within the realm of dispassion" (*Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 63).

[dispassion] is the fullness of love, that is to say, the perfect indwelling of God in those who through dispassion are pure in heart, for they shall see God."[127]

Elder Paisios at the miraculous spring of Saint John Chrysostom in Farasa. October 1972.

127. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 26.65, p. 197.

Noble love

The apex and crown of all the elder's struggles was noble love.[128] "I love everyone the same way I loved my family," he said. "I feel like they're all my brothers and sisters."

Full of love for man and creation, the elder was aflame with divine love. From the time he was a small child, he gave alms, helping many people. When the poor of Konitsa needed something, they ran to him for help. Moved by their sighs, he would give away even the clothes on his back. He embraced the villages of Konitsa with his tremendous love, and he found ways to help the sick and needy.

At the beginning of the elder's time on Sinai, when he would leave the monastery on Sunday evenings to go back to his cell, the monastery's steward would provide him with bread, flour, and other staples. The poor Bedouins who knew his schedule would stop him on the road and ask him for a *baksheesh*—a donation. He would give them whatever food he had and then continue on to his hermitage with an empty bag.

He placed great value on alms-giving: as the elder saw it, a

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128. This was one of the elder's expressions. It means the love which seeks no reward, like the charity of a rich man who gives with no thought of receiving anything in exchange. Trials and temptations result from a lack of such love: usually, man looks for recognition and repayment. The elder, in just these two words, showed the attitude we should have toward our fellow man.

person's charity showed whether he was worthy to receive divine mercy and salvation. "Someone might not be a Church-goer," he said, "but if he feels compassion for someone who's sick, if he gives alms, don't be afraid for him."

One time, he helped exhume the remains of elder Prodromos at the neighboring cell of Saint John the Theologian. The incident made an impression on him, because the bones were yellow, signifying holiness, even though elder Prodromos, a mule-driver, had been concerned mostly with the mules and not so much with monastic disciplines. "It looks like he gave alms," the elder commented.

He was saddened by social inequality. "What kind of Christians are we?" he said. "We have two or three houses and a place in the country, while other people don't even have a place to lay their heads!"

He encouraged people to give to the poor, because he believed that "When you receive something, you feel human joy. But when you give something, you feel divine joy. In the spiritual life, you receive by giving."

His charity knew no limits. He gave away everything, and he knew each person's needs even before he was asked for help. He distributed with discernment the food and clothes, which people sent him, to sick monks, the poor, and the students at the Athonite School. No one left empty-handed. Along with these simple but generous gifts, he also distributed blessings—crosses, prayer-ropes, small icons, books, and so on—and he helped people spiritually. Visitors left consoled and happy.

When he would make trips out into the world, he always carried a bag full of such blessings for people. "I have a piggy-bank here in the cell," he said, "and every day I put in

one or two thirty-three-knot prayer-ropes. When I went to Athens I took them all with me—five hundred or so—and it still wasn't enough. And there were the little icons and crosses I made with the press, too."

"He was a man who always wanted to do good," Katie Patera recalls. "Not a moment went by when he didn't help someone if it were at all possible." And the good he did had grace and beauty, because he was discreet. He didn't want the person he was helping to feel indebted. He helped people as his brothers or sisters, and he set them at ease.

He gave easily, but it was difficult for him to receive. And when he did accept something, so as not to offend the giver, he had a way of giving back more than he had received.

Even though he was poor, he would help people with financial difficulties by giving them his meager funds or borrowing from the other fathers. For example, when a troubled young visitor to the Holy Mountain didn't have money for the return trip, the elder, exercising his discernment, helped him financially.

Materially, he could have helped many more of the poor than he did, because people would have entrusted him with large sums of money, but the elder refused offers like that. Occasionally, he would refer people with needs to someone he knew who could help them. He didn't want to become an almsgiving bank. He was like a bank teller, actually, but what he distributed was grace and spiritual help. He wasn't a dry well, but an unceasingly flowing spring. Such a spring gives water to the trees, the birds, and the other wildlife, and still has water left over.

When he saw someone in need, he gave them his heart—and, of course, a material blessing. When he didn't happen

to have anything left to give someone, he would give his prayer-rope or his sweater.

Because of his great love, the elder sacrificed even his reverence! He didn't hesitate to give away the holy objects he so revered. Once, he gave away a cross he wore that contained a piece of the True Cross. Another time, he gave away a small case he wore around his neck containing a tooth of Saint Arsenios, with which he would make the sign of the Cross over the sick and demon-possessed. He even gave away the holy relics of Saint Euphemia, a portion of which it had pleased God to let him have. Only someone who knew his burning love for the saint could understand what a great sacrifice it was for him to be deprived of her holy relics. And this didn't happen just once, but many times. The saint kept providing him with blessings from her holy relics, and he kept sharing them with others—even though this deprived him of the bodily presence of Saint Euphemia, whom he held in such reverence. He acted the same way with miracle-working icons.

Even when the elder had to criticize or reprimand someone who had behaved wrongly, it was an example of his love. A mother can reprimand her child without the child becoming alienated from her. In the same way, people welcomed the elder's corrections and criticisms, because they knew his love. They recognized that he was right, and they felt safe.

His forbearance made an impression on many. He forgave people who slandered him, and he prayed for them. If he learned that they had fallen into temptation or had some need, he ran to help, his heart suffering with them as if they were his brothers. "If we don't forgive others," he would

emphasize, "we find ourselves outside paradise."

The elder's overflowing love also embraced wildlife. The animals felt it, and they would approach him and eat out of his hand. He said, "I'll say to Christ, 'Christ, have mercy on me, a brute.' But if He asks me, 'Did you have mercy on the brutes, the animals? What will I have to say?" In fact, he did have mercy on them, and he loved them as creatures of God. "These poor things," he said, "don't have another paradise to look forward to."

When he departed Katounakia, he left behind a kitten. Out of sympathy for the animal, he spent two days traveling back to get it. During his time at Panagouda, there was a stray cat that would meow outside his door as night approached. The elder would get up, even when he was sick, and open the front door to the cat so it could eat and find shelter from the cold and rain.

"The elder's love was unmatched," recalls a layman who knew him.[129] "It embraced all people, the creation, and even the demons. A total stranger, a man of another religion, once came to his hermitage, and I saw the elder embrace him with the warmth one might show to a beloved brother. He told me once that he prayed with tears for the wretched state of the devil, and that the devil appeared and mocked him for it. I saw him care with tenderness and love for plants and for snakes, ants, and other animals."

One day, a clergyman found the elder sitting on a log in the yard, feeding the ants lumps of delight. "I'm giving them a little dessert and letting them have some rest," he said.

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129. Panagiotis Drositis, who hosted the elder while he was visiting Father Athanasios of Stavronikita (see p.196).

"They don't know that they need to take a break and eat."

Just as the soul is more honorable than the body, spiritual alms-giving is incomparably superior to material alms-giving. After the elder had worked humbly and acquired the virtues, his great love moved him to humbly dispense the mysteries of his experiences. This was his greatest good work, giving spiritual charity, helping many weak and unstable souls toward faith.[130] It was for this reason alone that he revealed to others the "mystery which cannot be taught"[131] – even though this was an act that caused him to suffer, one he referred to as "spiritual bleeding." This is characteristic of the love of perfect souls: they cannot keep anything for themselves.

The elder's whole life was giving, serving, and sacrifice, in many ways and at every opportunity. He said, "As long as man does good, he forgets himself. He's entirely good and he loses his selfishness. When he makes the problems of others his own, he doesn't have his own problems."

When he prayed for the sick, he would say, "My God, help the sick and take away my health," and he would accept with joy whatever sickness God allotted him.

When the elder was receiving medical treatment in Konitsa, a little girl named Chrysanthi, who helped Katie Patera, developed intestinal cancer. The elder felt compassion for her, made the sign of the Cross over her, and prayed. "Christ," he begged, "give me the cancer. I'll take it." And the good Lord did not overlook his request. In the end, in accordance with his desire, the elder received cancer, an

130. See *Epistles*, p. 111 (and, generally, pp. 108–116).

131. Saint Isaac the Syrian, *Homily* 28, p. 140.

excruciatingly painful illness that ended his life. But he had in fact been suffering his whole life with those who were sick, and particularly those suffering from cancer.

"People come and tell me their troubles," he said, "and it fills my mouth with a bitter taste, like I've eaten onions. And when someone comes who's doing well, or whose problem was solved, I say, 'Glory to God, they gave me a sweet.'[132] When I hear someone else's pain, I could be sitting on broken glass or stepping on thorns, and I wouldn't feel it. When someone's really suffering, I'd die to help them."

One time, the elder was praying on his knees in the chapel with a troubled young man. The elder's sensitive heart couldn't bear it: he burst out in sobs with his tears pouring out until they drenched the small rug that was there. On another occasion, the elder burst into tears and sobs over an Athonite monk who was suffering terrible temptations. Another time, a young man, telling him his problems, began crying—and the elder wept with him. "Stop, my child," he said. "Someone's going to see us and think we're crazy."

Empathizing with the pain of others, the elder forgot himself and his own ailments and offered prayer from the heart. "Christ," he said, "forget about me, don't think about me. Look at people who are suffering."

The streams of tears and his pleading prayers were accompanied by fasts and countless labors. Once, when he learned that a young man was in bodily and spiritual danger, he ate nothing for days and didn't stop praying until he learned that the danger had passed. He would make com-

132. Literally, "a piece of halva," a sweet common in Greece.—Trans.

plete forty-day fasts in order to help a single soul. Grateful recipients of his aid made certain cases well-known: a young man who wanted to know God's will for his future path; a young, unsettled monk who needed to settle down; another young man close to the monks there who was struggling to defeat a passion; a weak monk needing to make progress, and so on.

Throughout his life, moved by his great love, he fasted, labored, and prayed for the people of God. This love was his driving force, and his struggles and prayers exuded its sweet fragrance.

The elder himself related an incident that showed the great scope of his love. "I felt such a love for everyone then," he said of the experience. "I spread my arms, and I asked if I could even embrace the trees and feed them." And, saying this, he made a motion as though he wanted to embrace someone very dear to him.

The elder, with true love, never took his own needs into consideration, and because of this he attained to the measure of perfection. He hated selfishness, and in its place he put love for God and man. "Elder Paisios was unique," recalled an Athonite monk, "in that he never thought of himself at all. One time, I told him, 'Father, think of yourself a little,' and he replied, 'When people are coming here with problems, what should I do? Look after myself?'"

Even at the end of his life, when he was deeply completely exhausted from frequent bleeding, he was oblivious to his own problems. When he realized that he had a visitor who was in great need, he would lean on the fence surrounding his hermitage or sit down on the board

that he used as a seat and strengthen the brethren.[133]

Truly, if selfishness is not exorcised from us, divine love will not come to dwell in our hearts. "The love of God," writes Abba Isaac, "... is found in the soul's renunciation."[134]

The elder once spoke about pure love:

When we don't take our own selves out of our love, then that love, no matter how big it is, isn't pure. It's stale. But when we remove our selves, it becomes pure. When our own selves are involved in our love, that means our love is laced with selfishness. But egotism and love can't go together. Love and humility are twin brothers, locked in a tight embrace. Whoever has love has humility too, and whoever has humility has love. We can labor and struggle, but if our love isn't cleansed and pure, we won't see any fruit. God rewarded Anthony the Great with the gift of miracle-working, because he had pure love. Meanwhile, other people's greater efforts were a waste.

That was why the elder said, "Monks have opportunities people in the world don't have. They're the only ones who can acquire divine love. You manage to see the other person as your father, as your brother – every grandmother as your grandmother, every elderly man as your grandfather – and it doesn't matter if the person's beautiful or ugly."[135]

To attain this kind of love, the elder struggled to keep the commandments of God. "If we love God," he said, "we're careful about keeping the commandments." In the words of

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133. See Luke 22:32.

134. *Homily* 66, p. 325.

135. "Recognize from this inequality that you are far from perfect love. For perfect love presupposes that you love all men equally" (Saint Maximos, "Concerning Love," *Philokalia,* vol. 2, p. 66).

Scripture, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."[136] It was in this way that the elder purified his heart, becoming a dwelling-place of the God of love.

When he reflected on his own love, the elder found himself lacking. "If I had a Catholic brother," he commented, "think how much would I cry. Meanwhile, how many millions of people don't believe in Christ, and how much have I cried for them?"

People sensed his great and unselfish love. Once, an emotionally traumatized young man, burdened with problems, came to see the elder. He met the elder on the footpath outside the hermitage and embraced him, sobbing. The elder consoled the young man, and he helped him to finish his studies. After he went to do his military service, he would write letters to the elder, addressing him as "My dear, beloved father."

Visitors suspected his great asceticism just from the sight of his ascetic face, but his all-embracing love was something they felt. They would meet him, and, instantly, it was as if they had known him for years. A bond formed, and the elder's love followed them everywhere—even when they departed this life, because he continued to pray for them.

There were dozens of people who considered themselves particularly close to the elder—who thought that they were his favorites, that they were closer to him than others. Each felt the elder belonged to them, and each felt a special love for him. In fact, the elder loved each person individually. He gave himself entirely to each and loved each soul as it

136. John 14:21.

was—with all its passions and weaknesses—as his true brother and an image of God. He gave love to everyone, but his heart never ran dry, because he was connected with Christ, the inexhaustible fount of eternal love.

"I don't worry about where I'll go when I die," he said. "I don't care about myself. I'm not trying to do good to get into heaven." He would prefer, he said, "for people who live far away from God to go there instead, so they can taste a little bit of paradise. We've already tasted paradise here, but they're living in hell." The elder would ask God if he could trade places with a tormented soul in hell. Is this perhaps the same wish made by the Apostle Paul when he wrote, "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren"?[137]

He advised monks: "Cultivate the spirit of brotherhood. I comfort my brother, and then the monastic life becomes paradise. I remember how it was at the monastery, how everyone tried to comfort his brother because Christ said, whatever you do unto your poor brother, you do it unto Me. If someone helps the poor, the wretched, think what he would do if it were Christ."[138]

About relationships with others, the elder said, "We always have to start from what comforts the other person, not what's convenient for us. And then everyone will be comforted and there'll be love."

He gave everything for God and man, so how could God not give the elder His abundant grace? God listened to the

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137. Rom. 9:3.

138. "He who loves the Lord has first loved his brother, because the second is a proof of the first" (*Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 30:25, p. 228).

prayers of the elder, beloved child of God that he was, and answered them with miracles.

Love was a virtue natural to the elder. "From the time I was a little child," he said, "I had it in my blood." This love was then purified in the furnace of the ascetic life and of noetic and unceasing prayer. He attained the love of God, which the holy fathers call "the love that delights in God."[139] He loved people so much—how much greater must have been his love for God!

Someone said to him, "I want to feel divine love," and the elder smiled. "Listen," he replied, "first, a baby drinks milk, then cream or something mashed, then soup, and when he's grown up he eats steak. If he eats steak when he's small, he'll choke, right?" And he added, "We have to come to the point of loving God—our hearts have to leap with joy. Until the love of God comes, we have to struggle constantly. When it does come, you don't want to eat or sleep, just like Abba Sisoes. When you feel the love of God, you're getting close to divine madness. The world doesn't understand—what a shame."

His description of someone who's reached such a state revealed his own life: "You're like a kitten, when it flops down and rubs itself against your leg, rolls around on the floor and licks you. You're beside yourself with the love of Christ just like that—you're rolling around at His feet. When the love of God really descends on someone, he loses himself. Thick bones turn as soft as candle-wax. When someone reaches the love of God, it's like he's drunk. He's captivated by love for

139. *Kallistou Katafygiotou, "Peri theias henōseōs kai Biou theorētikou, [On divine union and the contemplative Life]" Philokalia*, in Greek, vol. 5, p. 14.

God, and he can't think of anything else. It's just like someone who's drunk—he doesn't care about anything. People try to tell him his house is on fire, and he doesn't care—he just says, 'Well, let it burn.' That's why it's not good for someone to be in this state for too long."

His faded icons of the Mother of God and of the Crucifixion, worn from his loving kisses and tears, were silent witnesses to his divine love.

Once, he received so much grace and felt so much love that he couldn't take it—he fell to his knees. His great love was expressed in heart-rending prayer for others. He wanted to love God with his whole heart. "Even if our hearts were as big as the sun," he said, "it still wouldn't be worthwhile to divide them. Our hearts are already small as fists. If we divide them, what'll be left for Christ?"

In one of his letters, he wrote, "When man manages to be free from everyone and everything, then he can feel God's great love, which overwhelms him and makes him into God's servant."[140]

Even the wild animals of the forest felt the elder's love. So did the Bedouin, even though they spoke different languages. Even the troubled youth of the modern day were moved by his love. In the elder, they found the love and the affectionate father they had been missing. And today, many of them, even ones who never knew him in this life, go and soak the earth of his grave with tears, because they sense that he embraces them with noble love from his present home.

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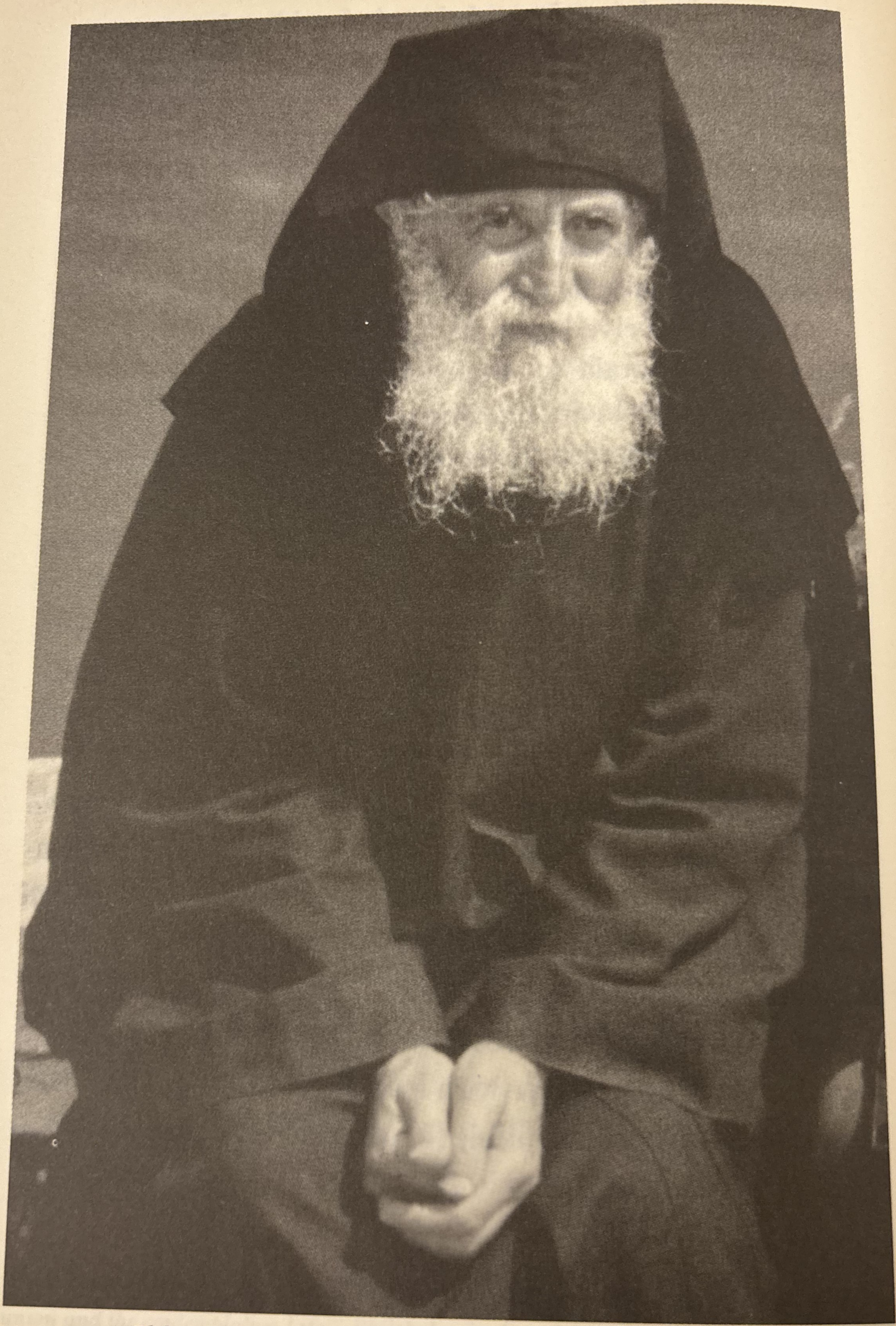
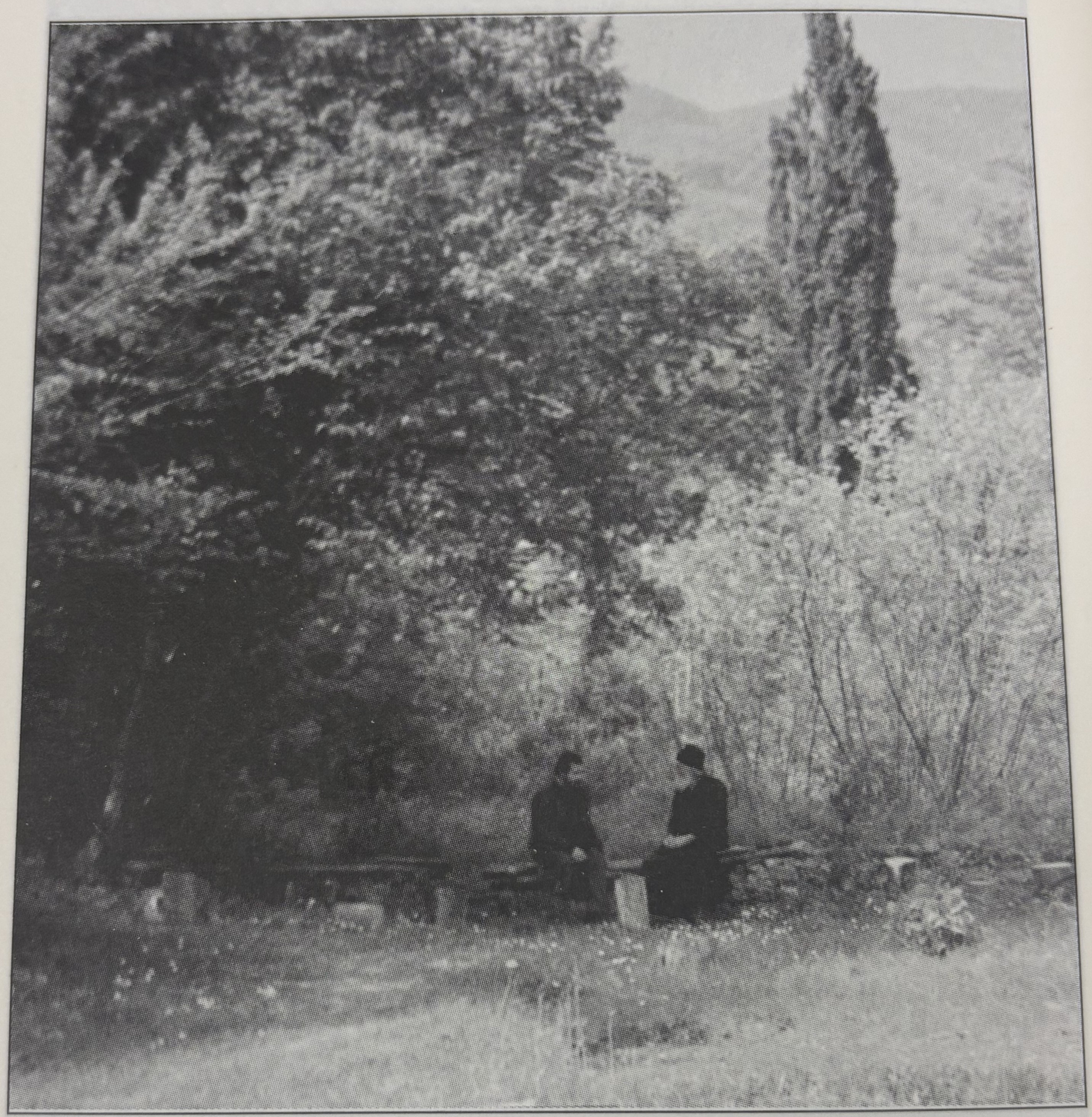
140. April 6, 1969.

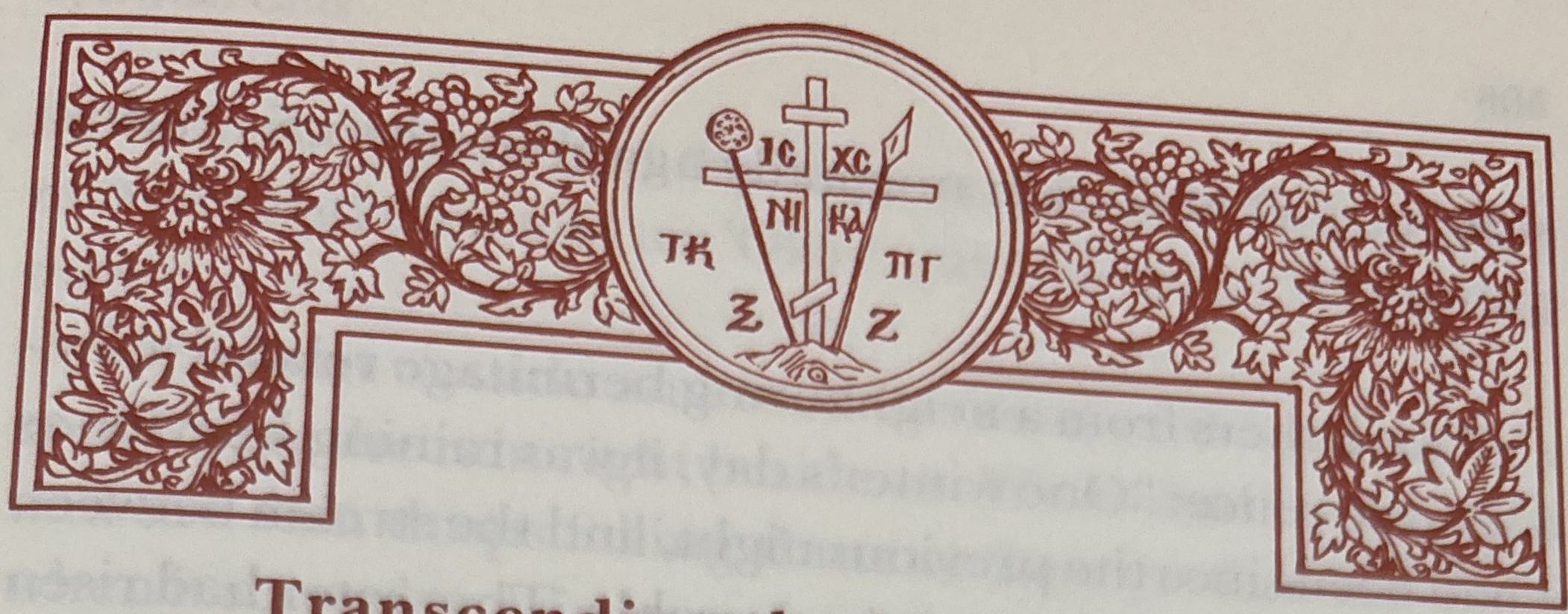


Elder Paisios at the port of Daphne, Mount Athos.

Spiritual Gifts



The Elder comforting and advising a visitor.



Transcending the Laws of Nature

Sometimes, as we shall see, the elements would give way to Father Paisios—he would set aside nature's laws.

Waterproof

The elder used an umbrella and a raincoat—he didn't have any special resistance to rain. On the contrary, he was sensitive to cold and humidity. But sometimes, for reasons known only to God, the elder would be standing out in a downpour and wouldn't get wet—it would be raining all around him and not even a drop of water would touch him.

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"Once," recounts a witness,[141] "I was taking the elder to Souroti from the Holy Convent of Saint John the Forerunner in Chalkidiki. We had torrential rains the whole way there—it was like the floodgates of heaven had opened. When we arrived, the sisters were waiting with umbrellas and overcoats for the elder, so he wouldn't get wet. They motioned for me to get as close as possible to the building. But at that moment, oddly enough, the rain stopped falling for about two yards all around the car—beyond that, it was still pouring. After the elder told me goodbye and went in-

141. Constantine Koutsoyiannis.

side, it started to rain normally again on the car and all around."

Two fathers from a neighboring hermitage related a similar occurrence: "One winter's day, it was raining heavily, as it had been since the previous night, and the stream between us and Panagouda became impassable. The water had risen so high and the current had become so strong that it washed away the bridge, as well as a smaller one further down. There was no way to cross anywhere along the rushing stream. That day, the elder paid a visit to our hermitage. His shoes were notably clean and dry, though rain continued to pour. Of course, he was carrying an umbrella, but in a violent rain like that, even with an umbrella, he shouldn't have been able to take ten steps without his cassock getting soaked – never mind his shoes. It made a great impression on us: so much rain and he wasn't wet at all, and besides that we couldn't figure out how he could have crossed the flooded stream. We wanted to follow after him when he left in order to get an answer to our question, but he wouldn't let us."

Through the elder's prayers, others experienced similar incidents. "One day," recalls one alumnus of the Athonite School, "A friend and I were heading back to the Athonite School from Stavronikita monastery, and we were going to stop at the elder's cell at Holy Cross to get his blessing. Suddenly, the weather started to become very bad. 'This is great,' I thought. 'Now we can spend the night at the elder's cell and see how he lives and prays.'

"He was waiting for us in the doorway. "Welcome," he said. "I've been expecting you." We went inside and listened

as the rain approached. He kept us there for about twenty minutes and then told us: 'Okay, guys—you can keep going now.'

"We went outside and took the road to the school. We could hear the rain right beside us. We looked to our right and saw rain drops falling three or four yards away. Even when it started to rain more heavily, not a drop touched us. We reached the Athonite School, the rain following us the whole way, and we never got wet. Then, as soon as we got inside, we saw it raining all around."

Invisible

"In February of 1979," recounts a man named George,[142] "I visited Elder Paisios at the Hermitage of the Holy Cross. Finding the door open, I shouted and shouted from the gate, but there was no answer. It was eight in the morning, so I waited. Suddenly, I saw Father Paisios in front of me. It startled me—I really lost it. He said to me calmly, 'I was here, George.' Later, I mentioned the elder's sudden appearance to two spiritual fathers. 'He was right in front of you,' they told me, 'but he revealed himself when he wanted to.'"

"When the elder was at Panagouda," recalls a pilgrim named Eleutherios,[143] "I visited him because I was facing a big problem, and I absolutely needed to see him. I entered through the back gate and called out to him, but he didn't answer. Then I went to Papa-George's cell, but I didn't find anyone. I went back to Panagouda, calling out to the elder

142. George Kourkouliotis of Corinth.

143. Eleutherios Tamiolakis of Crete.

every so often, and I rang the little bell, but he wasn't to be found.

"I had halfway decided to leave, but I hesitated at the little creek. I stood there in the utter silence, irresolute, not knowing what to do. I didn't want to leave, because everything really did hang on his answer. Suddenly, I heard a voice next to me: 'Eleutherios.' I turned and saw the elder standing to my left, about three yards away. I was afraid – my hair stood on end. I hadn't noticed any movement or heard anything: I had been by myself at the creek. It was summertime, so there was no noise from running water. It was totally silent, and I could have heard a pin drop.

"I stood there for moment, trying to figure out if it was really him before me. I went over to him and made a prostration, and I asked him where he had been that he hadn't heard me all that time and how he had appeared so suddenly. He avoided explaining – he just said that he'd been deep in the woods and had been informed that I needed him.

"He asked me what I wanted to tell him, and, when he realized that I had a lot to say, we crossed the creek and sat down a couple of yards away from the main trail to Panagouda.

"I had started to tell the elder what was on my mind, when I suddenly heard the voices of some other pilgrims. I lowered my voice. 'Just speak normally, Eleutherios,' he said. 'Don't worry.' I continued speaking, but when I could hear that the voices had come much closer, I stopped. 'Go on, keep speaking,' the elder repeated. 'But Elder,' I replied, 'they'll hear us and come over here, and then I won't have time to tell you everything.' 'Don't worry,' he told me, 'and don't lower your voice.' So I continued to speak in a normal

tone, the elder answering me in the same way. The visitors came within two yards of us and didn't see or hear us—they just continued on to Panagouda.

"The elder had appeared so suddenly, and the whole encounter was inexplicable and miraculous. But I thought of all this as natural since I believed that he was a holy person: on another occasion, with simplicity, he had confided in me about the angels and saints that had appeared in his cell. He opened up a world to me that I knew was completely real, because he was completely real, and a saint."

"In 1982," recalls one Athonite hieromonk, "Our holy abbot gave four of us a blessing to go visit Elder Paisios. We rang the little bell and waited a little while. As night began to approach, the other three fathers left, but I humbly waited in the hope that I would learn something profitable from the elder.

"Waiting there anxiously, I suddenly saw the elder in the yard, near the logs he used as seats. He was standing with a prayer-rope in his hand, repeating the Jesus Prayer in a particularly solemn way, emphasizing each word. I was startled because he came out of nowhere—he literally just appeared there. After two or three minutes, he came over to me and, with his characteristic grin, invited me inside, addressing me, not by my name, but by the job I happened to have at the monastery that year.

"Trying later to explain what had happened, I realized that, along with many other gifts, the elder also had the gift of becoming invisible."

In Midair

On many occasions during his time of prayer, Elder Paisios was raised on high, such that even his body was lifted above the earth. Even when working or walking somewhere, he might be seen floating above the ground.

Once, at Holy Cross, he had a remarkable experience. "While I was praying," he recounted, "I don't know what happened to me, but I was lifted up into the air, and I saw the hermitage below me. I couldn't understand how I'd gotten up there or how I came down."

"I visited the elder at Panagouda," recalls an Athonite monk, "and I found him building a wood-stove out of bricks. He was standing on top of a board that he'd set on top of the building materials. While he was working, I saw him levitate with about a foot of air beneath him. At first, I wondered if something was wrong with my eyes, but he really was in midair. A little while later, I saw him standing there normally again."

Communicating Grace

Wherever he went, the elder transmitted abundant divine grace to those around him. As he himself taught, "When a person who has grace goes somewhere, his spiritual gentleness spreads out instantly, like an electric current. It's the same with someone in a demonic condition—what he's got inside of him spreads out. Our spiritual state also affects other people." The elder was aware of the grace that God gave him, and he would spread this wealth among others as it was needed.

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"When I was a little boy," recalls a man named Basil,[144] "six or seven years old, I used to go to Stomio monastery with some other children my age, accompanied by Elder Paisios. The road up was steep, and when he'd see that I'd gotten tired, he'd say, 'Basil, when you get tired, make the sign of the Cross and give me the wood you're carrying, and then keep going.'

"Along the way, we came across a fallen rock on the trail. It was big—at least four or five feet across. 'Father Paisios,' I said, 'when the loader comes, it should drag this rock off to the side.'

"'Out of the question,' he replied. 'Where are we going to find a loader? You're a loader: you'll drag it out of the way.'

"'Me?' I replied. 'I can't do it—I'm too small.'

"'Try. Make the sign of the Cross, say the Lord's Prayer, and you'll do it. I'll help you: you push the rock, and I'll push you.'

"He laid his hand on the rock as well, barely, and it moved out of the way. It wasn't close to the edge—we couldn't push it over easily. It had to be rolled a ways and then pushed over. To me, it felt like it weighed just six or seven pounds. At the time, I didn't actually realize what had taken place—I didn't understand until I got a little older."

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"When I'd go to the elder's hermitage," recalls a pilgrim named George, "he would see me off after our discussion."[145]

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144. Basil Mourechidis of Konitsa.

145. George Kourkouliotis.

"I got used to him giving me a light punch in the head or on the shoulder. At the beginning, I didn't realize exactly what help I got from this simple touch. Eventually, I became aware that, from it, I received strength, courage, and optimism. Once, when he neglected to tap me on the head, I told him, 'Elder, give me a blessing.' He answered, 'I'm not a priest, but since you want one ...' and he laid his hand on my head. At that moment I felt power come from him and go into me. I left feeling relieved, with all of my problems sorted out. The elder was full of grace."

"Once," reports a police officer from Thessaloniki,[146] "I was heading back to Thessaloniki with Father Paisios and Father Gregory of the Hermitage of the Transfiguration. We were about a hundred miles away, and it had been at least thirty hours since I'd gotten any sleep, so I was exhausted. The two elders were in the back of the car. At one point pappoulis said to me, 'You're tired. Move over, and I'll drive,' and he climbed over into the front on the passenger side. He was joking, of course. The elder didn't drive—he didn't even know how to. But, amazingly, I was fully rested when we arrived at Souroti, and I couldn't figure out how we'd made it there so quickly."

Lifting a Boulder

"When Father Paisios was at Stomio," recalls his brother Luke, "a large boulder fell onto the trail. A lot of us got together to try to move it, using sticks for levers, but it didn't work. Everyone left, and the elder said to me, 'Well, you go

146. Angelos Horozidis.

on too.' I went just a little ways away, hiding myself so I could see what he was going to do. I saw him make the sign of the Cross and grab hold of the boulder, and he moved it off the path like he was picking up a chair!"

"What a Blessing!"

"One year," relates a parish priest named Father Charalambos,[147] "After the feast day of the Monastery of the Great Lavra, I walked six hours to visit Elder Paisios at Panagouda. It had been twenty-five years since I had seen him. I found him in the woods. He knew who I was immediately, and, amazingly, he told me the dates on which I had become a deacon and a priest.

'Father,' I said to him, 'can we have a little something to eat?'

'I've got something,' he replied.

"He opened a plastic sack: it had three very small tomatoes inside and one-and-a-half bread-rusks. 'We're going to eat these?' I thought to myself. Not holding back, I said to him, 'Elder, what are we going to eat? I haven't had anything since yesterday – I could eat twenty of these tomatoes and it wouldn't be enough.'

"He answered me, 'Papa-Charalambos, we'll pray, you'll bless the food, and there'll be more than enough.'

"He opened the sack, tore it in the shape of a cross and laid it out like a tablecloth. He gave me two tomatoes and one piece of toast, and he took half a piece of toast and one tomato. So we stood up and said the usual prayer, which

147. Father Haralambos Anastasis of Kalithea, Konitsa.

finished with him saying, 'Holy father, bless.' I blessed the food, and we ate.

"Where did my appetite go? I was stuffed: it was like someone had been shoveling food down my throat. I couldn't even finish all of the toast—I had to leave a little bit. The only thing I wanted was water.

"The elder kept saying to me, 'Eat, Papa-Charalambos.' 'Eat what? I'm full, Elder.'

"The rest of the day, everywhere I went, I was too full to accept anything offered to me or to eat at all. But I was asking for water constantly.

"It made such an impression on me that later, walking by myself, I was saying, 'What a blessing that was! Just like when Christ blessed the five loaves and two fish, and five thousand men were filled, not counting the women and children. A blessing from the Lord!'"

Never Captured

Out of humility, the elder avoided being photographed. It made him feel so uncomfortable that he even had an aversion to it.

The elder would give in to a would-be photographer for only one reason—if that person might think out of sensitivity and humility that he was being denied permission because he was unworthy. Elder Paisios didn't want to hurt people like this by refusing them. He preferred to afflict himself rather than dishearten his brother—and so, out of love, he would sacrifice even his humility.

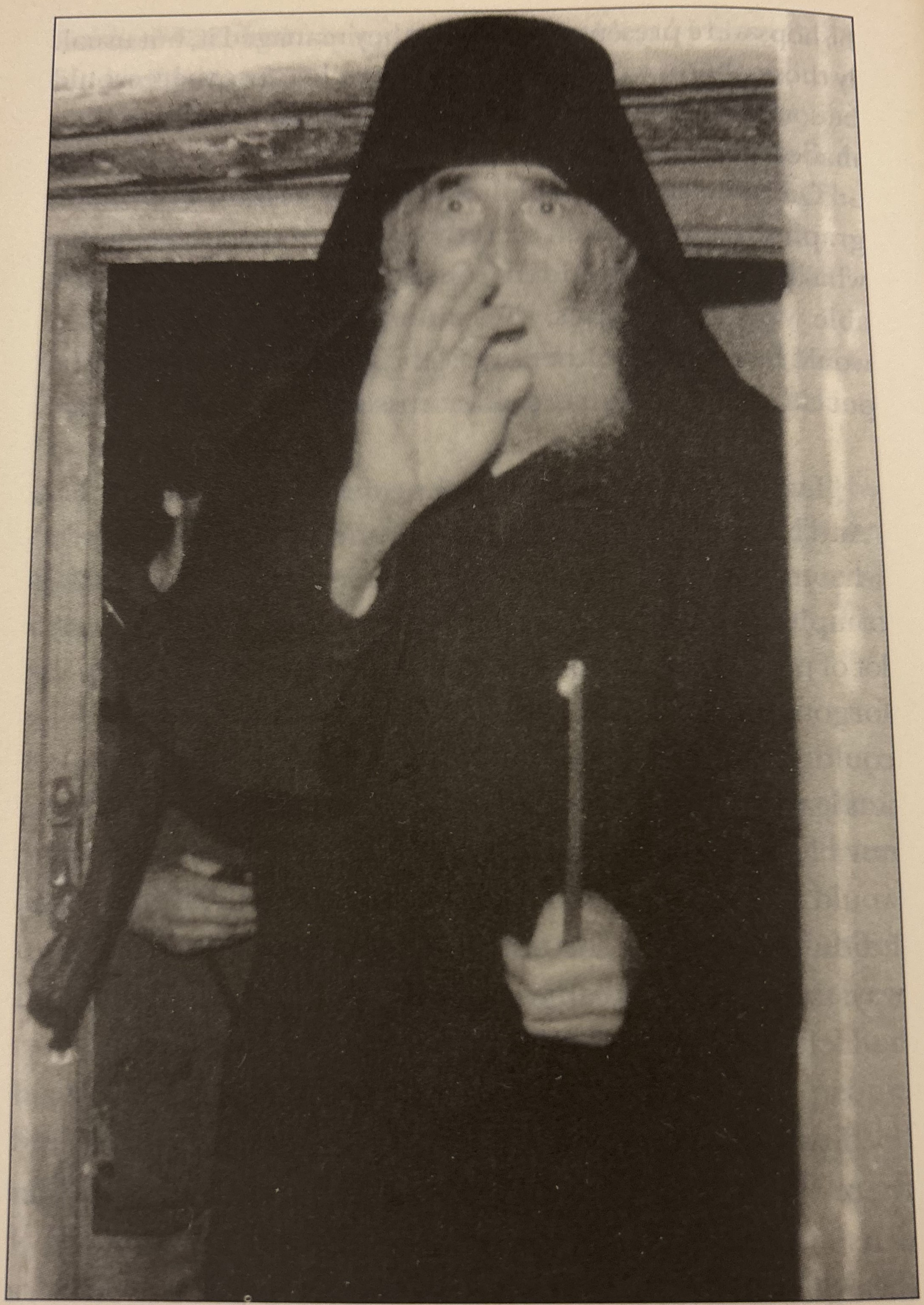
Many people tried to photograph him secretly, or openly at times when they knew he would be shy about reacting negatively, such as during a procession or when abbots or

bishops were present. Sometimes they managed it, but usually those photos wouldn't be good ones, because there would be something sorrowful about the elder's countenance that made a person feel guilty.

On the other hand, there are many accounts of photographs that were taken secretly or imposed on the elder, in which he would be hidden from the camera's eye in remarkable ways. Sometimes, the camera would jam or the film would be exposed. Other times, the photograph would come out clearly—but with the elder missing!

"I visited the elder," relates a professional photographer, "And his counsel was enlightening and helped me a lot. But what moved me most was his great love and sacrifice. He was completely exhausted because of his illness, and he was in a lot of pain. But as soon as he saw that I really needed help, he forgot about his own problems, lay down in the yard—he couldn't stand or even sit—and gave me his attention. As I was leaving, I really wanted to take a picture of him, to bring our blessed conversation to mind often. Knowing that he would refuse if I asked, I took two shots secretly. But, though I didn't realize it at the time, the elder foiled me in his own way: the two photos came out totally black! It was as though I had left the lens-cap on."

"I went to Panagouda," recalls another pilgrim, "And there was no one around. The elder had to be inside, because the padlock on the wooden door was unlocked. I thought to myself, 'This is my chance.' I put my camera through the fence so it couldn't be seen and pointed it at the door of the cell. I rang the little bell, and, as soon as the elder



The Elder caught unexpectedly by a photographer's camera.

came out, I pushed the button. I was overjoyed.

"You can imagine my surprise when, after I developed the film, I saw that the door had come out perfectly, but the elder wasn't anywhere in the photo!"

Similar events took place when people wanted to record their conversations with him. At times, the tape wouldn't roll, or it would roll but not record anything. Sometimes everything would be recorded—birds, voices, other noises—but the elder's voice would be missing.

"We went with some classmates to see the elder," recalls a college student. "We started talking, and the elder realized that we had cassette recorders. He told us to turn them off.

"The others turned theirs off, but, since mine was well-hidden, I left it on. Later, he repeated himself, and added, 'Even if you don't turn them off, they won't record anything.'

"Leaving, I didn't turn it off immediately. Afterwards, when I listened to the tape, I realized that it had recorded sound before and after the discussion, but nothing from the discussion itself!"

According to a second account of the pilgrim George,[148] a group of college students once went to see the elder, and one of them had a tape recorder in his pocket to record the discussion. After they had talked for a while, the elder said to him, "That thing in your pocket hasn't recorded anything." The young man was amazed. And, in fact, when he listened to the tape, it hadn't recorded a single word.

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148. George Kourkouliotis.

Lumps of delight out of Snow

"It was February 10, 1980," recalls one clergyman, an alumnus of the Athonite School. "The snow was slow to melt, so there weren't many people making the trip to Panagouda, the most welcoming hermitage on the Holy Mountain. I thought it would be a golden opportunity to catch him by himself, so I got a blessing from the head of the school and went down to Father Paisios's simple hermitage to drink a little of his spiritual ambrosia.

"As soon as I reached the garden gate, I yanked the wire to ring the little bell. The elder came out onto the balcony, slid the key down [on a line he'd set up], and I opened the gate [and walked up to the building]. He welcomed me and told me to sit down.

'How are things, elder?' I asked him. 'How are you?'

'What can I do?' He replied. 'I'm tired, I'm sick'—he had the flu—'... people won't just let me die.'

'No, Elder,' I told him—'We need you.'

'It looks like I've still got a lot of sins,' he said, 'unpaid bills.... I don't have anything to offer you. I had some lumps of delight, but I had some visitors from Karyes this afternoon,[149] and they ate it.'

'I don't want anything, elder. I just came to speak with you.'

'No—' he said, 'wait a minute.'

"Without losing a beat, he went out into the snow. I watched him out of curiosity. Through the open door I could see him bent down over the snow. He had his back to

149. Specifically, the visitors had come during the traditional Greek mid-day rest—so the sick elder had been caring for people even then.—eds.

me, but it looked like he was doing something. After a minute, he came back inside, holding a little tin. Inside there were some unequally sized concoctions with finger and palm prints on them. They were all different – some bigger, some smaller – and they were totally white, like the snow, as though they had a lot of powdered flour on them.

'Take one,' he told me. 'Take it and try it.'

"I ate one. It tasted like lumps of delight – actually, it really was lumps of delight.

'Take another one,' he said, 'but no more.'

'This is great lumps of delight, Father Paisios,' I said.

'What lumps of delight?' he replied, laughing. 'It's snow.'

"He said to me, 'Look – don't tell anyone. How many guys do you live with? Take some for them, but be careful not to say anything.'

"It was getting dark, so I left the hermitage and did as the elder had said. Three of the other guys ate the lumps of delight that he had made out of the snow – I didn't say anything about how they were made, since I didn't have a blessing. Now that the elder's reposed, the 'ban' is lifted, so I'm recounting the story to glorify God."

Reconciliation with Creation

The elder was given the gift of associating with wild animals without being harmed by them, just as Adam did before the fall as well as many other saints.

Wild animals sensed his great love and saw in the elder the purity that man possessed before the fall. The holy fathers teach that when man regains the ancient beauty he had when he was first created—that long-lost divine grace—he becomes a master of creation, having dominion over the fowl of the air, and over every creeping thing and beast upon the earth. Thus comes reconciliation with creation, as the holy fathers call the state before the fall attained by the saints. "When God dwells in a man and rests upon him," we read in the Life of Saint Euthymius, " all beings are subject to him, as they were to Adam before he transgressed God's commandment."[150]

The elder used to say, "As soon as man puts himself in someone else's place, then he can love everyone, all people, even the animals and the wild beasts. He fits everything inside himself. He doesn't even leave room for himself because of his love.

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150. *The Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, p. 18.

"When I see a wild animal, I think about how I could've been one myself. God is head of the household, and He could've made me an animal. When I put myself in the place of a wild animal, I love it and have compassion on it—even a snake. How'd I like to be a snake, to go out into the sun to warm up, and then have someone come over and step on me, and crush my head? Divine love tells animals things. An animal can tell the difference between someone who loves it and a hunter who wants to kill it. The animal will come up to the person who loves it—it won't be afraid. I thought it was like that for all the wild animals except snakes. But then I found out the same thing happens with snakes. Even with the viper—and if the other snakes were lambs, vipers would be goats."

A deacon once asked him, "Elder, I heard you've got some snakes. Is it true?" "Sure, deacon. I've got snakes here in my heart," replied the elder—speaking of his passions. Come back when you become a father confessor,[151] and I'll show them to you."

"We went to the monastery in Stomio almost every weekend," writes a man named George.[152] "It was as though we were drawn to Father Paisios by an inexplicable force. We found serenity there—near him, our spirit and souls grew calm. And we would try to help him with different jobs.

"Once, he sent me to get a pickaxe and shovel from the shed just beyond the main entrance of the monastery.

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151. In the ancient tradition which is preserved in Greece today, only specially selected priests have a blessing to hear confessions.—eds.

152. George Papathemistokleous of Konitsa.

'George,' he said, 'don't be scared—a couple of little snakes live in there, but they're harmless.'

"I was about to do what he asked me to do when I saw two huge tree snakes in front of me, moving toward where the tools were stored. Terror-stricken at the sight of them, I stepped back, ready to run. Then I felt the elder's hand, bony yet strong, restraining me; and, with a calm and peaceful voice, he 'rebuked' the snakes. 'Get in your corner! Can't you see George is scared?'

"He had followed me, since he knew that the sight of the snakes would frighten me. I turned to look at him, but I couldn't catch his eye—he was looking down at the ground. I tried to stammer something out, but he had already gone—he was far away, as though his appearance had been a mirage.

"Another time, as I entered the monastery kitchen, I heard an old schoolmate of his say, 'Let me shoot it, elder.' And, as he said it, he lifted his hunting rifle. In a peaceful and quiet voice, the elder mildly replied, 'No, John—he's got a cross on his noggin.' I leaned out the window and saw a hare casually nibbling something. On his forehead, he had a black cross. The elder called the rabbits to himself, like we do with cats, and they weren't afraid to live around him. He'd caught this hare among the bean plants, and he'd made the sign of the Cross on its head and told Basil (his brother-in-law) and the other hunters to be careful not to kill it."

One time two small bears came into the yard of the monastery at Stomio. The elder grabbed them by the scruff of the neck and told them, "Next time, don't come into the monastery like that. Come around the back by the kitchen,

so I can feed you." And then he took them there.[153]

"A group of Cypriots had come to Panagouda in order to see the elder," recounts a pilgrim from Cyprus. "He told them to have some lumps of delight. But when they opened the container, they grimaced, looking at each other and murmuring: it was full of ants. Apparently, despite the instructions written on the lid, a pilgrim had failed to close it tightly. There were so many that it looked like the sweets had turned black—you couldn't even see them.

"When the elder realized what had happened, he took a look at the container, nonchalantly removed a piece of lumps of delight, and placed it to one side. Then, affectionately, but seriously and somewhat authoritatively, he addressed the ants. 'This one is yours,' he told them. 'Go eat it, and leave the rest for the visitors.'

"Astonishingly, the ants obeyed him. They all left the container and gathered around their piece of lumps of delight to eat it."

"I knew the elder from when he was fifteen years old," remembers Father Alipios, a monk at the skete of Saint Anne. "By the grace of God, I became a monk at the Holy Monastery of Koutloumousiou. Going to see him regularly, I would hear about his miracles, and I started wanting to see one. The thought tempted me for about a month.

"One winter's morning, at the beginning of November, I went to see the elder. I found him alone, washing his hands

153. This account was related to a novice at Stomio, Paul, by two men from Konitsa.

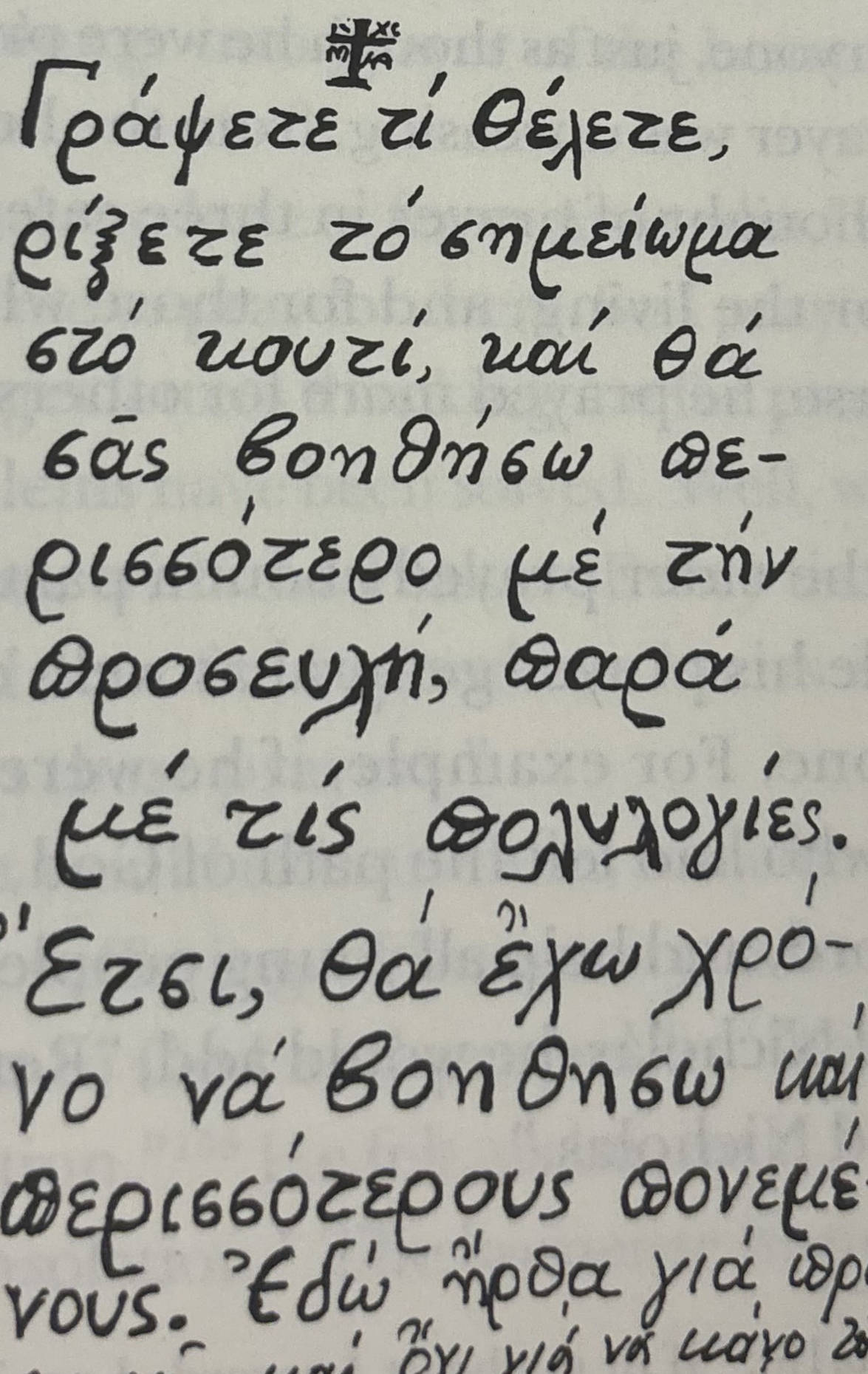
in the drum outside. He opened the gate and told me to wait. Then he took a piece of aluminum foil with some crumbs in it, opened it, and looked towards the sky. There usually weren't any birds around there, but a flock of them had gathered. What were they doing there all of a sudden? Some were sitting on his head, others on his arms and shoulders, and he was feeding them. I was bewildered by the spectacle I was watching. My heart pounded quickly with excitement, and I was laughing helplessly. Smiling, the elder addressed the birds, 'Go over to him too.' He talked to them as though they were people. 'Go over to him too,' he said to a bird sitting on his arm. 'He's one of us.'

"This lasted about two minutes, and then the elder folded up the aluminum foil, and the birds flew away. While I was still staring at him in bemusement, he told me, 'go on now.'"

Praying for the Whole World

For a period of time, pilgrims visiting the Panagouda hermitage were greeted by the following note, posted on the gate: "Write down what you want, and put the note in the box, and I'll help you more by praying than jabbering. This way I'll have time to help more people who are suffering. I came here to pray, not to play teacher."

Monk Paisios


Γράψετε τί θέλετε,
ρίξετε το σημείωμα
στο κουτί, και θά
σας βοηθήσω περισσότερο με την
προσευχή, παρά
με τις φλυαρίες.
Έτσι, θά έχω χρό-
νο να βοηθήσω και
περισσότερους φονεμέ-
νους. Εδώ ήρθα για προ-
σευχή, και όχι για να κάνω τον
δάσκαλο. Μωραΐτης

This statement impresses on one the monk's place as part of a spiritual radio network, whose single task is the important job of broadcasting messages—prayers—to God. One can also see from this note the significance that the elder ascribed to prayer on behalf of the world. Based on the end results, he considered prayer more effective and beneficial than conversation and correspondence.

The elder's prayer was borne aloft by two wings: pain of heart and righteousness. Thus, he taught "Many times just one sigh is equal to prayer, to many hours of prayer, or to vigil, " and "without righteousness," he said, "prayer isn't heard"[154] The elder's prayer for the world sprang from, and went hand-in-hand with, his whole spiritual state, and particularly his great love. This rare gift, to pray on behalf of the whole world, was given to him after great struggles. He prayed for everyone, just as though he were praying for himself, and his prayer was unceasing, from the heart, pure, and effective. He thought of prayer in three categories: prayer for himself, for the living, and for those who have fallen asleep. Of course, he prayed more for others than for himself.

Whenever the elder prayed about a particular circumstance, he made his prayer general as well, extending it to include everyone. For example, if he were praying for a young person who had left the path of God, he would add, "Remember, Lord, and help all young people." Praying for a sick man named Nicholas, he would add, "Remember, Lord, everyone named Nicholas."

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154. Ps. 65:18 (66:18): "If in my heart I regarded unrighteousness, let the Lord not hear me."

The elder's knowledge of the Psalter helped him in this task. Saint Arsenios had assigned different needs to different psalms: the First Psalm, for example, was to be prayed for the planting of trees or a vineyard, and for them to bear fruit. The elder followed the same plan, except that he would expand the needs to be prayed for. So, after having read the First Psalm, he would not only beseech God for the newly-planted trees, but also for infants in the womb, that they would have God's blessing from the very start, in order to bear fruit. Whenever he read the psalm that mentions the tempest, he would add, "My Christ, don't you see the tempest of the world, the way it's troubled?" And, when he beseeched God to calm the agitated sea, he would also pray for agitated humanity. In this way, his prayer embraced the whole world. Then he would put the Psalter aside, and his nous would plunge into prayer of the heart for people and for all creation.

"They send me letters from Australia," the elder said, "and they ask me to pray for them. So I pray with the Psalter. Afterwards, I get letters thanking me for praying and telling me their problems have been solved. Well, when I see that, I pray even more with the Psalter. Every time I pick up the Psalter to read out of it, I spend two hours with it. And I see that God hears these prayers."

This prayer would exhaust him, since he would fully participate in the suffering of humanity as he presented peoples' afflictions to God and prayed for "their requests that are unto salvation."[155] He felt, as he put it, "a lot of pain, but also a lot of consolation." The immense human suffering that

155. "Morning Prayers," *A Prayer Book for Orthodox Christians.*

he saw all around him made him go out of himself. He could sometimes be seen dragging his feet from exhaustion, his knees weak from fasting, his earthen vessel ready to be dashed into pieces by illnesses, but he never stopped praying for the world.

He would say, "Prayer helps the world so much—when there's heartfelt compassion, of course. I don't feel someone else's pain when I'm sitting comfortably with my legs crossed and have every comfort and convenience."

The elder's prayer was accompanied by fasting, toil, prostrations, and, most importantly, humility. He used to say, "We should ask humbly. I say, 'My God, I'm a brute. Have mercy on me and on the whole world, too.'"

He believed that he was responsible for others' suffering. "If I was holy," he said, "and God heard my prayer, they wouldn't be suffering." In a letter,[156] he wrote, "The wretched Paisios is—wretched. Thanks to him there are a lot of tired souls, because he didn't gain grace so he could help people in the name of God, when merely human methods aren't enough."

"We ought to understand," he said once, "that when a sick person doesn't get better, it's our fault, because Christ said that He gave us the authority to work miracles, but we don't do anything." He added, "What can I do, Father? People come looking for help, and I can't help them. It's my shortcomings that are to blame—they keep me from being a beloved child of God, and God doesn't hear my prayer."

"Then why do people come, Elder?" responded his visitor.

"You know what happens? What I realized is that they

156. Dated March 14, 1971.

need love. These people have suffering souls, and I am patient with them."

The people, however, had a different opinion about how things stood, and so they never stopped coming. Being aware of his own poverty, like a good beggar the elder would kneel down, stretch out his hands to God, and beseech Him to help. He would burst out with supplications. "My Christ," he would pray, "I beg You, help this paralyzed man to pull himself together a little so he can look after himself," or, "My Panagia, I've got to bother you again..."

He got into the habit of lighting beeswax candles and oil lamps for the guests in front of the icons in the guesthouse. At night, he lit small candles in his cell inside a metal box, which had tiny holes in it that formed crosses, and he would pray for the entire world. One day he had opened the Beautiful Gate of the chapel[157] and put a candlestick with a lit candle in front of them. Was this perhaps an extended supplication of sorts about some highly serious matter?

Whenever there was such a matter or acute national or ecclesiastical crisis, the elder would counsel the fathers, in consideration of the great need before them, to pray a great deal: "Let's get a firm grip on our prayer-ropes," he would say. He did this in part to motivate them, but his main purpose was to conceal from himself the effects of his prayer.

He prayed a lot, but he also wanted fellow participants and laborers in prayer. "If I could," he would say, "I'd put to-

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157. That is, the entrance to the altar; usually, though incorrectly, called the Royal Doors. (The distinction remains clear in the ancient churches of the Holy Mountain, which typically feature true "Royal Doors"; that is, doors between the narthex and the nave.)—eds.

gether a prayer crew that would never stop. The world's in a lot of need."

Two fathers, going to a vigil on the eve of Saint Spyridon's feast day in 1989,[158] passed by the elder's cell in order to get his blessing. They saw that his face was flushed and that he seemed quite upset. "Where you're going," he said to them, "pray and tell the others. Something horrible is happening in Romania—they're having a civil war, and a lot of people are being killed." The elder saw the events of the Romanian Revolution on his spiritual "television," and, grieving and praying intensely, he shared in the trial of the Romanian people.

The elder was fully aware of his duty as a monk, to pray for others. He used to say that he "tied to the prayer-rope" everyone who visited his hermitage.

A parent once entreated the elder to pray that his son would escape from some bad company he'd fallen in with. A little while later, he came back to thank the elder for his son's change. The elder assured the man of his continued prayers. "He escaped from there," he said, and, holding up a prayer-rope, he continued, "but he'll never escape from here." The son, perplexed, would later say, "I don't know what happened to me. There wasn't any particular reason for it—I just didn't want to hang around them anymore."

The elder would pray for everyone, and God would give to each according to need. "You should see," he would say, "how much prayers help the world! Everyone gets divine help, because they deserve help, and God finds the right moment to give it. When prayer's intense, Christ Himself comes

158. That is, on December 24, 1989, according to the new calendar.—eds.

down and helps the soul. When someone's got boldness in prayer, it's as though he's a member of the cabinet who gets something he wants from the president."[159]

"Before I was discharged from the army," recalls an Athonite monk, "I came to the Holy Mountain on leave, and I met Elder Paisios for the first time. I asked him about some personal matters, and then I mentioned a close friend. He wanted to marry a young woman, but her parents wouldn't agree, and now he had fallen into despair and wanted to kill himself. After I went back, I would meet with my friend, and he'd tell me, 'I try to kill myself, but I can't manage to go through with it—something's holding me back and won't let me hurt myself.'

"When I was discharged, I decided to go to the Holy Mountain and become a monk. Before leaving, I visited Souroti, where I saw the elder again. Seven or eight months had gone by. With concern, he asked me, 'How's your friend?' and he used his name. It was only then that I realized the elder had been praying for him this whole time, and that it was the elder's prayers that had kept him from harming himself."

"The monk's offering," the elder stressed, "is his prayer for the world. Instead of visiting people in prison, he prays for the reposed."

"How much are we supposed to pray for the dead?," someone asked the elder. "Can someone take a soul out of hell?" And he answered, "I know from experience that a soul

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159. The elder, of course, refers to "a minister" and "the Prime Minister." (The text has been changed to avoid suggesting a pun on the elder's part, which could not exist in the Greek.)—Trans.

can go from a dark cellar into the living room—do you think that's no big deal?"

"You don't have any work to do?" he once told a monk. "I'll find you some—do prostrations for people who've reposed. Do you know how much need they're in?"

Since his prayer was responsible for helping so many souls, the devil would try to deter him from it. "The tempter figures out how to get in our way," the elder used to say. "It sends me people to pull me away from prayer. But the opposite happens too—I recognize when God is sending them."

An elder from a neighboring hermitage had, on a few nights, heard chanting coming from Father Paisios's cell. He asked him about it, and the times he mentioned were times that Elder Paisios had been at prayer. Elder Paisios was at a loss—he didn't know anything about it. "No," he replied, "I don't do services. I do them with a prayer-rope." Perhaps heavenly powers assisted the elder in his prayers, relaying them to God? The world is upheld by the prayers of the saints, just as is written regarding Saint Anthony the Great: "Thou ... didst support the world by thy prayers."[160]

We do not know if the elder, in certain cases, also supported the world by his prayers. It is however certain that he supported innumerable souls—each one of which is worth much more than the whole world. By his prayers, he healed the sick and purified demoniacs, and only God knows how many he quietly helped to find God and be saved.

Now that the elder is no longer near us to light candles

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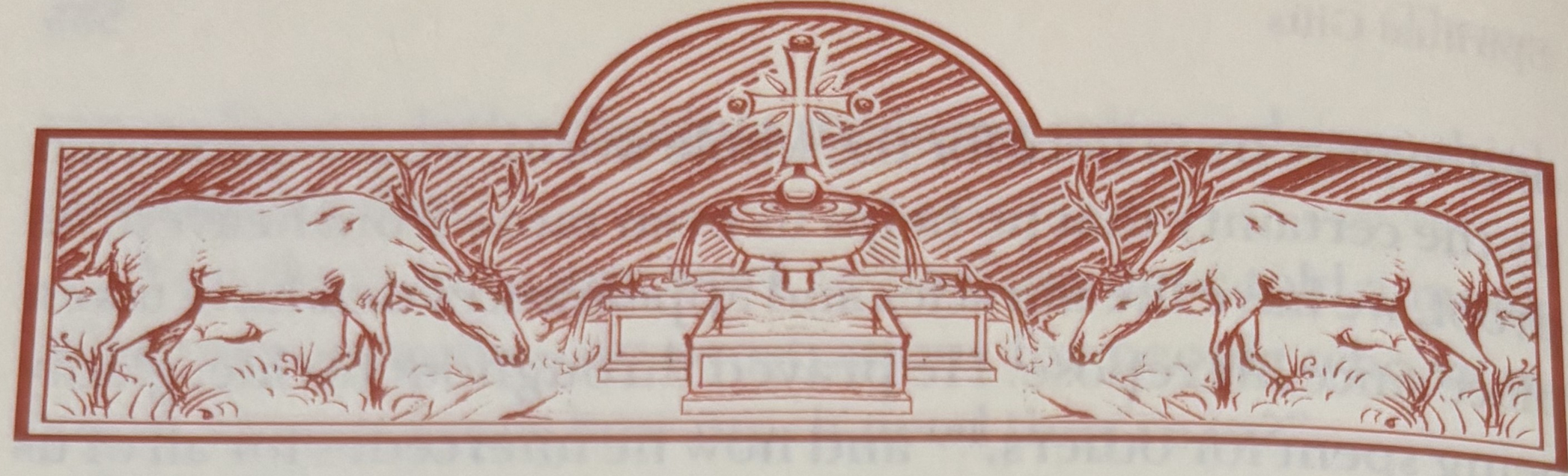
160. The phrase is from the Dismissal Hymn for the Saint's feast on January 17 (*Great Horologion*, p. 388).

and to pray from here for the whole world, we are comforted by the certainty that he helps us even more from heaven. As proof, we have the miracles and appearances that have taken place since his repose. He prayed throughout his life, gladly being spent for others,[161] and now he intercedes for all of us with the inextinguishable candle of his prayer burning vigilantly before the Holy Trinity.

The small church of Saint Barbara on the outskirts of Konitsa. It was in this church that Christ appeared to the young boy Arsenios (Elder Paisios).

161. See 2 Cor. 12:15: "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you ...."—eds.



Gift-bearing Teacher

Those who spoke with the elder or have read his writings agree that he possessed a gift for speaking as well as the gift of theology—the greatest of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Initially, he avoided teaching others, until the following incident occurred. "Papa-Thanassis at Iveron was a good monk and a spiritual man," the elder recalled, "but he was also a great orator. Oh my! He could say two words and win you over. One time, he came to my cell and told me, 'Look—Paisios, my son, with your ability, you could help someone.' And that's how he persuaded me to receive people and do whatever I could to help them."

His speech was simple, like that of the fishermen-apostles, practical, vividly descriptive, winsome, tender, and sweet. It fell like dew onto thirsting souls. His story-telling was unparalleled. He easily wove together charming stories and jokes, so as to make his narratives enjoyable and more picturesque and so as to emphasize their spiritual aspect. He often spoke in parables, using examples from nature and from daily life. He was lucid, poetic, and aphoristic. He could speak comfortably all day long, without preparation, and his listeners would hang on every word.

He didn't give lectures or seek to play the teacher. Usually, he discussed matters with his visitors; answered questions; or held gatherings when asked, at monasteries

he had a relationship with.

With a few words, he would address the concerns of most. Being a man of discernment, he had a way of turning insignificant occurrences into magnificent spiritual lessons. He could turn trivial conversations into spiritual ones. "Glory to God," an Athonite monk remarked, "we fixed the roof of our cell." And the elder transformed the conversation, turning from the subject of building to the building up of the soul. "The roof's the most basic part of a house," he remarked, "because it keeps the rain out. What we need is to have our heads on straight so we don't let tempting thoughts get through."

His words touched people's souls. "What made an impression on me," said a former drug addict, "is how the elder managed to reach us and spark our interest with just a few words." Depending on their disposition, some came around and repented, some were puzzled, some were inspired, and still others were comforted. He didn't persuade people with reason—he helped them in a spiritual way.

His versatility, his practical understanding, his wisdom, and his vast memory provoked astonishment. He was able to guide monks and monasteries, to give answers to the problems of the laity, both married and unmarried, and to converse with scientists, who were impressed by his knowledge and wit. He would rise or descend as needed to people's educational level and spiritual state, taking into consideration their character, their profession, background, interests, and other factors.

Usually he spoke "unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort"[162] and "of the kingdom of God."[163] He

162. 1 Cor. 14:3.

163. Luke 9:11.

avoided speaking of theology without reason; but, when it was necessary, he would theologize unerringly, expressing in simple words his experiences of the vision of God. The vision of God precedes theology: it makes illiterate monks theologians. "Theology without experience," he would say "is like a mole trying to describe the sun."

To be sure there was a very human aspect to the elder's words, which depended on his knowledge and personal experience. He would occasionally preface his speech by saying, "My thoughts tell me..." or "I think that..." And, when speaking about current events, he, being human, made mistakes. He did not believe himself to be infallible.

When, however, he was asked about spiritual matters and circumstances pertaining to salvation, he would observe his questioner with care, praying for him mentally while looking deeply into his eyes with his piercing gaze. After being sure that he had understood the question correctly, "he spoke those things which grace gave unto him."[164] His replies were so clear that they would instruct from within, being received within the hearer like words of Holy Scripture. These words of the elder had a particular power, an incontrovertibility, since they were not his own, but from the Holy Spirit. The elder simply took the word of God, which is born from above, into his heart. It is this word, according to Saint Symeon the New Theologian, "which truly and accurately reveals [the saints'] real identity."[165]

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164. Saint Isaac the Syrian, *Homily* 21, p. 106.

165. *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 2, p. 121. ["Just as we recognize the different nations by their clothing and most people by their voice and speech, just so then do we recognize the saints by, on the one hand, their decency and attractive behavior and other outward signs; but it is their speech, on the other hand, which

In these instances he would speak as one having authority, with certainty, leaving no room for doubt. On the other hand, when God did not give him a word, he wouldn't answer. Instead, he would say, "Let's pray," and he would give a response after a few days.

The elder was by nature an eloquent speaker: keen, striking, and persuasive. But the strength of his gift lay not in the manner of his speech but in its content. He was able to disclose the kingdom of God and to change people's souls, because he himself had been changed by divine grace.

"The elder's counsel," notes Metropolitan Panteleimon of Xanthi, "Conveyed a sense of firm conviction and faith, supported by life-experience far above what we could understand...

"I would hear his words and marvel at his spirit—it was the Spirit of God speaking through His vessel. This gradually became a steadfast interior certainty for me. Elder Paisios became for me a guide to Christ, an interpreter of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, a pathfinder for the road to Heaven, and a light in my deep darkness."

The elder continues to help people through his writings. His books, which have been translated into many languages, have had an unprecedented impact. They are read avidly, speaking to the heart and touching both simple people and intellectuals. The instruction that the elder left behind has shown him to be a modern-day teacher of the spiritual life. His words, passed on by the people, have a charismatic influence and lead souls towards salvation.

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truly and accurately reveals their real identity. What the heart does not have, the mouth is unable to produce."—eds.]

The Gift of Comforting

Just as the springtime sun drives away fog and warms the earth, so the elder, with his gift of comforting others, drove away affliction, comforting each tormented soul that drew near him. Many took refuge in him, mainly for the sake of solace. They would come to him fretful and leave completely changed. Just by seeing him, they would receive strength and joy. Those who had the blessing of speaking with him would feel a joy like never before and leave as different people. Another person could have said more or less the same thing to someone who was suffering. But the elder's words transmitted the grace of God: they had a different kind of power.

He managed to take human pain and grief to himself and transfuse others with joy and solace. He would taste bitterness, while the people would be filled with sweetness and joy.

"So many people come," he said once, "and all of them are in pain. And all of them are happy and strengthened when they leave. But do they ever think about where this pain of theirs goes? All of it comes to me. They don't realize what remains with me when they leave here happy. It's fine for now," he continued—that is, the situation was still one he was able to handle—"but how far is this going to go?

His genuine love for each person made all the pain and problems of others into his own, and this yielded his heartfelt prayer for the suffering. Through him, was working divine grace, a particular grace for comforting.

The people were comforted by his example. Although he suffered from many illnesses, he didn't ask God to give him health—he endured and glorified Him. He was always in high spirits, overflowing with joy, and those who came to him would depart cheerful despite their afflictions. The elder didn't give artificial consolation. He would stress faith, patience, and the praise of God, emphasizing the spiritual approach to their trials and pointing out the purpose of their afflictions. He made the suffering of this present life sweeter by means of the hope of eternity.

Monastics would go to him, worn out by temptations and tempting thoughts. And, after one brief discussion, they would feel as if they had sprouted wings and depart like birds in flight. They would recover their original zeal, feeling as though they were beginning their monastic life at that moment. When they went back to their monasteries, the change would be so obvious that people would ask, "Did you go see Father Paisios?"

"Some of us, the new monks, visited Elder Paisios to get his support at the beginning of our monastic lives," recalls one Athonite monk. "And he really did boost our morale with his wise, grace-filled words. As we were leaving, he told us something which the others probably thought was irrelevant. 'Don't be upset,' he said, 'right around the doxology in matins, when the untamed flesh starts going crazy. It's because the blood descends down below, so to speak, from all the standing.' And that was exactly what I was suffering at

that time. I could see that I wasn't participating in the service either spiritually or rationally. I felt so ashamed that this was happening in the holy temple, just when so many divine and mystical things were taking place. But my pride wouldn't let me confess it. Elder Paisios, however, knew my thoughts and gave me comfort.

When someone approached the elder's hermitage, he would feel a sweetness. Many people have mentioned that the atmosphere of the hermitage in general lifted their spirits. No one departed from him without consolation.

"In 1978, I went over to Holy Cross to see the elder," recalls an Athonite monk. "My name then was Nicholas. I felt such sorrow then that it felt as though the mountain of Athos had fallen on my chest, stopping me from breathing. I was suffocating. I described my situation to the elder, who listened to me carefully. 'You were attacked by a temptation,' he told me at the end. 'Wait to see what we should do.' And he began to chant the troparion from the canon to Saint Nicholas: 'O blessed Nicholas, who art true to the Master...,' with such heart that his whole body quivered. He clutched my head to his chest. When he reached the middle of the troparion, I was overcome by such awe that I began to cry, but in a prayerful way. When he finished, grace and peace stayed with me. How did he change my situation so quickly? I felt that the whole mountain was filled with sweetness, and that it all came from the elder."

Young people with psychological problems and suicidal tendencies would receive solace, leaving with a firm resolution to repent and lead a spiritual life.[166]

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166. "To repent"; literally, to have a change of mind, to adopt a

Once, a Greek-Pontian refugee who wasn't able to find work fell into despair and decided to kill himself[167]. On the recommendation of a friend, he visited Elder Paisios and was changed. He became a different person, departing happy and full of hope. "Even if there's a mountain in my way," he said, "now I'll just go around it."

Once, the elder was visited, in the words of the gospel, by "one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four."[168] He and his companions saw the elder, who comforted the paralytic; and they left with joyous faces.

"A few days ago," said the elder once, during his time at Holy Cross, "A jewel of a kid visited. He had ideals, purity—I've never seen a kid like this. Everyone he knows thinks he's crazy—even his parents. They even took him to a mental hospital, because he wasn't going out with girls and he wasn't living a worldly life. He came here troubled, and he left totally changed. Someone else came by who wanted to hurt himself—when he left, he was like a butterfly.

"Once, someone came here after getting fed up with psy-

Christian attitude and, consequently, to embark on a Christian manner of life.—Trans.

167. Pontos Euxeinos (Hospitable Sea) was the ancient Greek name of the Black Sea. At the south Shore of the Black Sea in Asia Minor, Greeks colonized the area from the time of Homer and they formed a kingdom called Pontos. Later it became part of the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire and eventually was occupied by the Turks. Through the occupation years, Turks initiated many brutal pogroms annihilating the local population and forcing conversion to Islam. During the years 1914-1923, the Turks initiated large scale genocide of the Christian Greek-speaking population.

Some Pontians managed to escape to neighboring Russia and under perestroika many of them returned to Greece.

168. Mark 2:3

A Foe and Persecutor of the Demons

The devil's appearances to the elder, his meddling and attacks, are a prominent aspect of his spiritual biography. Father Athanasios Skliris, speaking of the elder to an acquaintance of his, once said, "Come meet a monk who fights against the demons on the front line." Once, a student told the elder about a professor of theology who maintained that the devil didn't exist. Laughing, the elder replied, "This guy's saying what? Around here, we get a performance from the devil every night." Indeed, the devil was a tangible reality for the elder, and he saw him frequently.

The impassioned and the weak war against their passions; the strong war against the devil. Strong as the elder was, he dueled with the devil and won. These clashes included actual hand-to-hand combat. The devil would depart the loser, leaving the elder in a rumpled cassock and with his hair a mess. Of course, it wasn't his bodily strength that enabled the elder to beat the devil.

At times he fought, not with one demon, but a great multitude of them. He would see a whole phalanx of demons rushing at him, seeking to destroy him. There were so many, the elder once reported, that "the last of them looked as small as a pinhead."

Once, someone brought him a cassette containing the revelations of a demon-possessed woman. The demon was

saying, through the woman's mouth, "And you tell Paisios to quit his moving about and sit still, because otherwise he'll get a good whipping—we'll attack him just like the other time." The elder listened without saying a word, smiled, and unexpectedly said, "Which other time?" The remark makes it obvious that he had many times received demon-inflicted wounds on a body worn out from asceticism. The elder understood the comment about his "moving about" to refer to the prostrations he would make. But it wouldn't be wrong to include as well the elder's manifold charismatic activity by which he snatched souls from the devil's webs.

This was something that the devil couldn't bear. That is why, as Asimakis Katsoulas, an infamous Greek Satanist,[169] has stated, on three occasions between 1989 and 1992, that Satanists sent followers to the Holy Mountain to kill the elder. The first one returned having suffered a heart attack, the second died from a snake-bite, and the third traveled Athos for seven days unable to find the elder's hermitage. Katsoulas has also said that, each time he would hear Elder Paisios's name, it would burn him—he would jerk about, become wild, and start screaming.

The elder used to say the following about the war against the devil: "The devil's good at what he does. If you hit a dog

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169. Katsoulas was convicted in 1995 of rape, murder, and kidnapping, acts he committed as the admitted leader of a twenty-member satanic cult that practiced animal and human sacrifice on the outskirts of Athens. The trial, which was reported in Greek and international news media, featured testimony that Katsoulas had convinced cult members that he was a vehicle for demonic powers by performing miracles. He and his deputy were sentenced to life imprisonment for their crimes.—eds.

a couple of times, it leaves. You hit the devil over and over, but there he is again—he won't go away. We just have to ignore him and not give him the right [to bother us]. When we're ignoring him and not giving him any right [to interfere in our lives], he just makes a scene, laughs, and wastes his breath. Nobody's afraid of the devil then—you don't see a wild dog, you see a weak puppy."

When the elder speaks of hitting the devil, he refers to prayer. "Unholy spirits," says Saint John of the Ladder, "...will flee as from fire when scourged by prayer."[170]

The devil appeared to the elder because God allowed it, not because the elder had given him the right to do so. The devil "had nothing"[171] in the elder, since the elder didn't give him any rights in his life. He was careful not to give the devil any opportunity to mock or reproach him.

A monk once took some sweets to the elder. He insisted that the elder try them, but he wouldn't. "Better not," he said. "Do you know what that little troublemaker would say to me tonight? I better not tell you." On another occasion, he refused someone who was offering him chocolate, saying, "Little troublemaker would make fun of me tonight."

When he wanted to tell someone about some taunting of the devil, he would spontaneously say, laughing, "You should see what that little troublemaker did to me yesterday." But then he would become serious immediately, his face expressing sorrow, and shaking his head sadly he would say, "The finest creature—how low he has sunk because of pride! He fell from the highest rank of the angelic orders

170. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 28.63, p. 220.
171. See John 14:30.

and became a devil, full of hate and evil. He went from an angel of light to a demon of darkness." The elder didn't feel hatred for the devil or curse him. He pitied him, and he prayed for him—that, if possible, he would repent and become once more an angel of light.

Having had countless encounters with the demons, the elder was a veteran adversary. He was no longer afraid of the devil, though he didn't underestimate him. He didn't ignore the devil's moves—his meddling and his traps. He could describe from experience how the devil takes the forms of other creatures. "The devil" he said, "really turns into people and animals and so on. You can actually touch him. It's a whole other state—it's not something we know about. You can see him, touch him, and tie him up, then he disappears right before your eyes. You can't say he materializes: it's some other, in-between state."

A convert to Orthodoxy once sought a blessing from the elder to translate *Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian* into French. He asked if he could leave out the parts involving the devil and the healings of people possessed by demons, because Europeans didn't believe in such things. Naturally, the elder, who had had so many first-hand experiences of the demonic, refused.

Appearances of Demons

One night when the elder was at Stomio, he said to a young man who was staying at the monastery, "You stay here—I'm going somewhere," and he set off for a cave. To get to it, he had to climb down a steep slope of three-hundred-yards. While he was climbing, he heard a rooster crow in the desert. He understood who it really was and did-

n't proceed further, remaining there all night in prayer. This was the first time the devil bothered him at Stomio.

One night he heard the sounds of a violin and other instruments. Looking out the window, he saw the devil dancing. He motioned to the elder to come out and dance also. Elder Paisios said the Jesus prayer, and in a little while everything disappeared.

Another time, a large group of demons appeared outside the monastery in the starlight, yelling for the elder to open up for them.

For some time at the beginning of the elder's stay at the Iveron skete, the devil would come and knock on the door of his cell, saying, "Through the prayers of our holy fathers." The elder would reply to him, "You're driving me to paradise, devil: you get me up to pray." "There was a temptation in that cell," he would say, "because a layman who was involved a bit with spells poured holy water from the Great Blessing of the Waters onto the walls in a scornful way."

One night, at the Hermitage of the Holy Cross, somebody knocked on the door. The elder, thinking it was a robber, lit a candle. A little while later there was a knock on the window, so the elder went to the chapel and lit more candles, to make the robber think there were a lot of people there so he'd leave. Next, there was banging on the roof. With that, the elder realized that the nighttime thief was actually the devil. "Oh," he said, "it's you. Why didn't you say so? Now I get it."

Once, the elder went to Stavronikita monastery for a

vigil. During the service, he fell into a light sleep for a moment. As the reading of the Six Psalms began at Matins, he started to awake and saw next to him a fierce black dog with its tongue hanging out. For a split second, he was startled. But he then made the sign of the Cross as he prayed the Jesus prayer, and the fierce dog, who was really the devil, disappeared.

Another time, a blasphemous thought came into the elder's mind. The elder reacted in an intense way, shaking his head. As he turned his face towards the window, he saw the devil in the form of a goat with wooly legs trying to get in. Reviling him, the elder said, "I could do without your mug."

"The first time I went to Holy Cross," recalls a layman,[172] "the elder took a long time to open up, and I was almost ready to leave.

"Finally, he opened the door, and I made a prostration. I noticed he was tired and somewhat uneasy, and before I was able to ask him why, he explained how, the day before, he had seen the devil himself. His exact words were, 'Do you know, my boy, that yesterday the devil was standing right where you're standing now? He was dreadful, totally yellow with red eyes. He wouldn't let me rest all night. The whole cell was shaking.' The elder was exhausted from staying up all night praying. The devil hadn't been able to enter into the cell or to do him any harm, because the elder's prayer was burning him."

172. Eleutherios Tamiolakis of Crete.

The elder related, "I saw the devil making different revelations. He was mentioning people by name and saying 'and that one's mine, and that one...' A lot of the things the devil says are lies, but a few of them are true."

Around 1979, the elder visited an Athonite monastery. At night, sleeping in a cell there, he heard banging. He thought that it was the ecclesiastikos,[173] so he got up and went to church. It was closed, and there was no one around. So he went back to his cell. Again he heard banging, heavy footsteps in the hallway, and murmuring, though he couldn't understand the words. When he looked around, he didn't see anyone—there was nothing but silence. When it happened a third time, the elder realized who was making the noise. It was little trouble maker; and the elder explained why he did it.

Healings of Demoniacs

Since he "wrestled the powers and rulers of darkness"[174] and emerged the victor, the elder received from God the grace to drive out demons—the gift of having, in the words of Scripture, "power against unclean spirits, to cast them out."[175] He could understand whether someone was demon-possessed, if he was under external demonic influence, or if he had a mental illness. He would say, "A lot of times, someone who's mentally ill will be demon possessed, too. The devil uses demoniacs like vacation homes."[176] Being an experi-

173. See note 57 p. 67 ("He sees the Lamb thrashing").
174. Eph. 6:12.
175. Matt. 10:1.
176. That is to say, the person is not constantly demon-possessed.—

enced doctor, the elder would make an accurate diagnosis and prescribe the appropriate medicine. He cured the demon-possessed with prayer. "When a monk is in a spiritual state and prays," the elder believed, "the devil dreads him. He curls up into a ball and leaves."

"Anyway," he would say, out of a thousand people that come here thinking they're possessed, only five will actually have a demon. For a demon to enter into someone, he must have really allowed it [that is, he must have really committed great sins]. In the case of young children, it helps to have the exorcisms read and to receive Holy Communion, since they're not accountable for their condition. It's not the same for adults: a demon-possessed person is healed by repentance and confession. First, the reason needs to be found; and then, afterwards, the priest should read the exorcisms to straighten the person out.

"In the Peloponnese, there was someone who had estranged his son from the Church," the elder once recalled. "He'd say, 'What's all this with Church and priests and so on?' So God allowed the boy to become possessed. He turned into a real animal! He even tormented his own mother. Finally, the poor woman had to leave the house, and his father began to go to different monasteries. The doctors couldn't find anything wrong. He came to me, asking, 'When will he get well?' I told him, 'When you stabilize your spiritual situation.' He learned all the lives of the saints, learned about monasteries, and so on. See how much trials help? In the beginning he was fed up with priests! How trials help us! Man is

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Trans.

compelled .... This is why there are spiritual laws—there are trials so that people will draw near to God."

"They brought a possessed girl to Souroti for me to see," reported the elder. "The poor thing was really exhausted and she showed me a tumor on her right side, as hard as a rock. I took out a shell that I had hanging around my neck, which had one of Saint Arsenios's molars in it, and I pressed it on the tumor. She started shouting, and her cries caused a stir all over the monastery. She was trying to vomit. Then I put the holy relic around her neck, and she began moving her head quickly, back and forth, to and fro, so much that she was holding her head because she was afraid it was going to jerk off. In the end, the demon left and, worn out as she was, she calmed down."

"One day," recalled the elder, "A layman who'd spent some years on Mount Athos came to visit, and he had a demon without realizing it. As soon as I saw him I knew he was suffering from a demon. I made the sign of the Cross over him with the relics of Saint Arsenios, and the poor man felt liberated, although he couldn't explain why."

The elder once recounted an event that took place while he was at Panagouda: "Once a sick young man came—he had psychological problems and he thought he was crazy. He was talking and talking, and when I'd answer him, he wouldn't listen—he was thinking about what else he was going to say. He was in a terrible mental state, and he had a demonic energy about him. You see, when the grace of God abandons someone, the demons step in. The young man was

desperate and had fallen into despair.

"The time passed, and I tried not to shift in my seat at all, so I wouldn't give him the impression that I was tired of his talking. For nine-and-a-half hours, I sat there and listened to him. I had been keeping vigil before that, I had problems with my intestines, I was sitting on a slab, and I was cold. Since I'd received him, I had to go to the end. If I'd stayed with him for, say, eight-and-a-half hours and then ran him off, eight-and-a-half hours of effort would've gone to waste.

"The next day his brother came to thank me. I asked him, 'What are you thanking me for? What did I do? He suffered that for eight years. I listened to him for nine-and-a-half hours, and I did something special?' He got squared away—he's a professor now and a faithful family man. He comes by and sees me from time to time."

"They brought a demoniac to Souroti," the elder once recalled. "The poor guy had an attack in Church: he was cursing and shouting. They brought the skull of Saint Arsenios and laid it on top of him. He was howling, then he fell down, as the nuns and I said the Jesus prayer. As soon as I put the skull on his chest, he started to convulse intensely, and then he lay there like a dead man who couldn't speak. The demon left. When the man came to, he was thanking Saint Arsenios and us. After that, he'd come to the convent regularly and bring things. When he found the door locked, he would leave them inside the gate and leave.

"One time he saw something in a dream, and he interpreted it with his own reasoning, so he started worrying and fell into despair. He started living a sinful life again, worse than before. So he became possessed again, but this time it

was a lot worse. His family suffered—he was married and had children. He was wrestling with the demons—he'd see them. But he was a very brave, stout-hearted man. The demons would hit him and knock him down, and he'd say to them, 'Don't come all at once—one at a time.' He suffered demonic attacks. He'd been told to say the prayer 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.' When he said it, the demons would whisper to him, 'Don't say that name. You should say 'Kazantzakis,' all the time,'[177] and they mentioned a few other names. One of them was Velouchiotis.[178] He believed that they were in need of prayer, so he wrote their names on a slip of paper to have them commemorated.

"Finally, he decided to come to Athos and find me. On his way to the cell, the demons told him, 'Don't go to that bag of bones—what's he going to do for you?' He came to my cell and begged me to pray for him to get well. I kept him for a while—he ate a little bit and I let him rest. We were in the same cell. While I was saying the prayer, all of sudden I heard a blast like a bombshell. The demons had picked him up and thrown him four or five yards away, from the guest house out into the hallway. He started howling and cursing. The demons were telling him, 'You'—and he used some foul language—'now we'll show you,' and they started lifting off his clothes. I couldn't see the demons, but I could see his clothes rising up by themselves and hear their foul language. They were trying to undress him. I didn't know what to do

177. See p. 146 ("Kazantzakis").—eds.

178. Aris Velouchiotis was the *nom de guerre* of Athanasios Klaras, a prominent Greek Communist who conducted an insurgency against the government in the aftermath of World War II.—eds.

with a situation like that. I brought the little finger of Saint Arsenios, and was crossing him while saying the prayer silently. He calmed down a little, and the demons left him, but after a little while it happened again. It went on for about two or three hours. Afterwards, he came to his senses. He was crying and thanking me. He told me that four demons had grabbed him and thrown him into the wall, and a fifth one was dragging him around by the nose.

"He went away healthy and he's still well today. Later on, he took on an important position in the government."

"A layman had fallen into delusion," the elder recounted. "Some demoniac had told him, 'You have a cross on your head, go become a homilist!', and he came to get a blessing. I told him, 'Look, my son, you've got a demon.[179] Go to Stavronikita Monastery so they can read the exorcisms over you.' Well, he got up and left, and he went back into the world and delivered homilies. During one of them, in front of everybody, the demon took hold of him, and he started cursing the Panagia and blaspheming the things of God. Everyone left frightened. They ended up taking him to a mental hospital. He was humbled, but he also fell into despair and became suicidal, since blasphemy is such a serious sin. When he came to see me again, I told him, 'God condescended to being abused to save you, and so others would be saved.' And that set him straight."

179. That is, the elder's visitor was possessed by a demon, a condition he fell into after becoming deluded.—eds.

As Myrrh Gushing Forth

The elder used to say, "Sometimes God grants a sweet fragrance during the time of prayer, and sometimes it happens when you're not praying. It's to comfort, strengthen, and instruct the soul, or it's to some similar end. The fragrance is powerful. It's not like the scent of perfumes—you feel a great relief. Sometimes the fragrance is so strong you can't take it." This divine fragrance is an indication of the presence of the Holy Spirit in holy places or wherever there are holy relics.

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"One time," he recalled, "when I was at Philotheou, I went to the cell of Saint Dometios. Suddenly, I was overcome by a powerful fragrance. When I asked about it, they told me that Saint Dometios had been buried somewhere around there, though no one knew exactly where."

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"Another time, when I was at Katounakia, I passed by a derelict cell where you could see some fallen iron bars and pieces of wood. I could smell a strong fragrance. Later, I found out that it had been the cell of a virtuous ascetic who ascended to a high spiritual state."

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When the elder was living at Holy Cross, he would sometimes pass by the dilapidated Russian Hermitage of the Holy

Trinity, where he would smell a strong fragrance. One time, one of his spiritual children was with him, and the elder asked him if he smelled anything. They went down to the ossuary of the cell, because the fragrance was coming from the skull of a virtuous monk.

As the elder was preparing to publish *Father Arsenios the Cappadocian*, he was in a room editing the text with a few nuns from Souroti. At one point, he smelled an ineffable fragrance, but he didn't say anything, in order to see if the nuns smelled it as well. After a little while, one by one they started asking, "What smells so sweet?" and "What's that fragrance?" The elder considered this fragrance to be a sign of Saint Arsenios's good-pleasure over the publication of his life.

Not only did the elder smell these fragrances, but he himself had become a "fragrance of Christ."[180] Countless times, divine grace attested to his saintliness and proclaimed him by means of a sweet scent, as though myrrh were gushing forth, coming from his own body, from his personal items, or from places where he had lived.

"In 1976 when I was a deacon," remembers His Eminence, Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol, "I visited Father Paisios for the first time with another deacon that I knew. At that time he was at the Hermitage of the Holy Cross. We knocked on the door and waited with anticipation. I had heard various reports of the elder, and I very much wanted to meet him.

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180. 2 Cor. 2:15.

"He came out and opened up for us. He was thin and had a blanket wrapped around himself—it was winter. He was very good-humored in his conversation with us, telling us jokes. To tell you the truth, I was disappointed: I said to myself, 'This is a great saint, a wonderworker like they say?' I had a different image of the saints in my head. He didn't tell us anything. All he did was tell jokes and feed us lumps of delight and so on.

"As we were leaving, at the wire fence, before we greeted him goodbye, we told him, 'Elder, tell us something spiritual.' He answered us, 'What can I tell you guys? You should do a lot of prostrations.' We asked, 'How many prostrations should we do?' He didn't answer, but his countenance changed, and he seemed different, and at that moment the entire place was filled with a very strong fragrance. Such a powerful, sweet smell! Everything was fragrant! The air, the rocks, the trees—everything.

The elder told us promptly, 'Hurry up, come on, get going.'

We bid him farewell and, without saying anything, we felt a great joy inside ourselves and started running. I don't know what got into us. Fragrance and great joy. We went on like that, running and laughing, and the smell followed us until we passed Bourazeri.[181]

"After that experience, I felt a great reverence for the elder, even though, just before that, my sentiments had been exactly the opposite."

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181. That is, the Hermitage of Saint Nicholas, a large monastic complex belonging to Hilandar monastery. It is nearly two miles outside of Karyes, between Karyes and Stavronikita monastery.—eds.

An Athonite hieromonk attests to the following account: "The elder was waiting for me one morning so that we could do some work together. When I kissed his hand, I smelled a strong fragrance—in fact, the whole yard was full of the scent."

Another Athonite monk relates, "The fragrance that sprang from the elder was something else. Many times, when I kissed his hand, I would smell a supernatural aroma, like myrrh. I would smell the same thing coming from his mouth when he spoke, even though, because of his extreme fasting, the smell should have been a foul one. Time after time, the first thing I would notice when I would pass by the creek was this aroma, which would accompany me the whole way to his cell at Panagouda."

A third monk also noticed that the elder gave off a sweet fragrance. "Once, when I was speaking to him, I noticed that he smelled fragrant. I told him about it, and he replied that it was happening because of my being good. Another time he gave me a little wooden cross, which sometimes gave off a sweet aroma. I told him about it, and he told me that it gave off that fragrance when I was in a good spiritual state."

"One time," relates Elder Gregory of the Holy Convent of Saint John the Forerunner in Metamorphosis, "I smelled a fragrance, like that of holy relics. Pappoulis was nearby. At first, I was wondering where it was coming from—as I got closer to the elder, I figured out that it was coming from him."

Communicating with Foreigners

It is well-known that the elder didn't know any language other than Greek. However, on repeated occasions—when there was a need—with the tongues of Pentecost he conversed and communicated wonderfully with speakers of other languages.

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"I was present once," recalls a hieromonk, "at the elder's hermitage, with three other visitors and a Frenchman who didn't speak a word of Greek. When it was his turn to talk with the elder, they went and sat on some logs and spoke for fifteen minutes. We saw that they were discussing something with great interest. How were they communicating without a common language? The foreigner left happy—his satisfaction was obvious from the look on his face."

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A French tourist had agreed to go see the elder along with a monk. That night there was a vigil at the monk's monastery, and after the vigil the monk went to his cell to rest. Desiring to see the elder, the foreigner went down to the hermitage by himself. They had a delightful conversation, on the basis of which the foreigner was of the opinion that the elder knew French perfectly.

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Father Basil of Grigoriou monastery gives a related testimony: "I had gone to the elder's cell around midday. The

door was locked. A young man was waiting there, lying down on the ground. He was a Greek-American who knew only English. 'How are you going to communicate with the elder?' I asked him. 'God will send somebody—' he answered, 'like you.' I ended up serving as their interpreter, relying on the little bit of broken English I knew (and even that, I barely remembered). But I noticed, to my great surprise, that Father Paisios understood everything—everything the man told him—even better than I did. Of course, he would answer him in Greek, using many simple and wise examples, which I interpreted.

"I'll never forget the answer that he gave to one of the boy's problems, which showed his great faith and trust in the providence of God. 'My mother,' the young man complained, 'asks me for money all the time. And whatever I give her from the little savings I have, she just wastes. I don't know what to do.' 'Listen, my boy,' Father Paisios answered him. 'The money that you'd give to your mother, give to some poor person instead, as charity. When you do it, say a prayer. Say, 'My God, I'm giving this on behalf of my mother—You take care of her.' Then God will take care of her by Himself. He'll find a way.'"

"Once," relates Father Paul Lampros,[182] "I went to see Elder Paisios with a Spanish man named Daniel who had converted to Orthodoxy. He wanted to speak with the elder, and I was supposed to interpret for them. Well, Daniel asked him a question, and before I could translate it, the elder answered. Daniel was amazed, and he asked me twice, 'What's

182. The name has been changed.

happening? You're not translating anything.' I told him, 'It isn't my fault—he's answering your questions.'

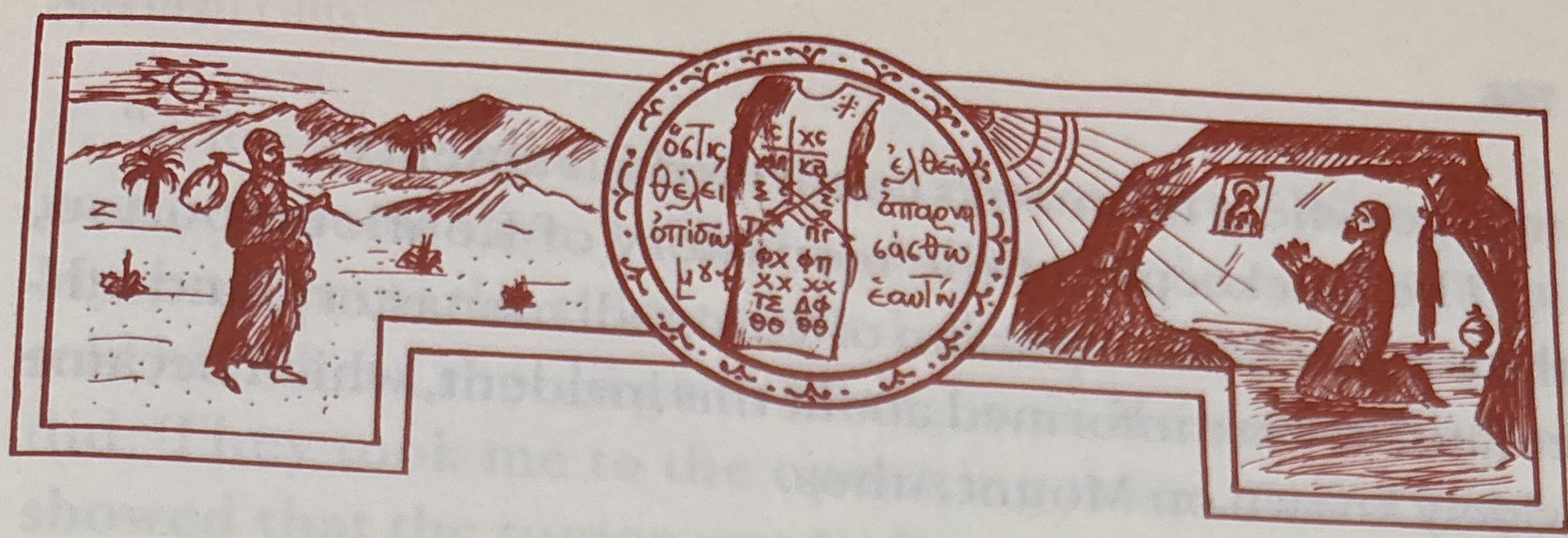
"The elder put him at ease, saying, 'Forget about interpretation. Tell me what you want.' So they spoke, Daniel in Spanish and the elder in Greek. I was amazed. Smiling, I said, 'What do you need me for? I'll leave you alone.' The elder took my hand and said, 'Stay, but don't tell anyone about this.' I considered what a great saint the elder was. I listened to their whole conversation, but afterwards I couldn't remember anything except for the last thing the elder said to Daniel: 'You must confess this sin.'"

"One day," relates a spiritual child of the elder, "I went to Panagouda very early in the morning. The light had just begun to shine. I rang the little bell, and the elder opened up for me smiling. He asked me,

'What do you say, Papa—when Saint Ephraim the Syrian visited Saint Basil the Great, did they need an interpreter?'

'I don't think so, Elder,' I told him.

"I entered the guest house and found a foreign visitor there. While the elder was getting ready to treat us to something, I started talking with the guest using the little English that I knew, and he told me that he had arrived very late the previous night, having lost his way. Time passed by, and the elder put him up for the night. In the beginning they hadn't been able to communicate. The elder had left him for ten minutes (probably to pray) and afterward they could talk together without any difficulty. The elder spoke Greek, and the foreigner English, but they were able to understand each other..."



Strange and Wondrous Journeys

At times, while he was in his cell on Mount Athos, the elder would be transported far away in order to help someone in danger, or for some other reason. Sometimes people saw him and heard him. At other times he was invisible: he would observe and know what was happening to some person, to a family, or in a monastery.

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At the monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti, an elderly nun was being hurriedly tonsured because of her imminent death. Father Paisios, who was on Mount Athos, had not yet been informed of the tonsure. Though he was on Mount Athos, he attended it and watched the funeral, unable to figure out which nun was being laid to rest.

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While the elder was on a pilgrimage in Jerusalem, a group of young people came to Athos in order to see him. He was absent from his hermitage, but they found him there anyway! They spoke with him and left very happy. They stayed the night at the monastery of Philotheou, where they mentioned that they had seen the elder. The fathers wondered how they had seen him, since he was gone. The next day a monk from Philotheou went to Panagouda and didn't find the elder there. He inquired at the neighboring her-

mitage, where the monks confirmed his absence.

The gatekeeper of the monastery of Koutloumousiou, the current Abbot Ephraim of Vatopedi monastery, and other fathers were informed about this incident, which became widely known on Mount Athos.

Once,[183] three nuns from the Monastery of Saint John the Forerunner in Metamorphosis traveled to the monastery in Souroti. During the vigil they chanted at the right-hand chanters' stand. Three times—during "More honorable than the cherubim," the Praises,[184] and the Cherubic Hymn—those at the chanters' stand heard the elder chanting from the Altar, even though he was on Mount Athos!

"One day," recalls Elder Gregory of the Monastery of the Honorable Forerunner, "There were a lot of people there when I visited the elder at Panagouda. In the end, he told me to sleep at the hermitage. We ate a snack of sorts and he said that we should get some rest, because he was very tired and operating on no sleep—he hadn't slept for two nights. In the morning, when he called me to come to the service, he told me, 'They didn't let me sleep at all last night.'

'Who, Elder?'

'There was a vigil going on outside the Holy Mountain. It was very beautiful.' Though he was on Mount Athos, he had participated in an all-night vigil at a monastery in the world."

183. On August 15, 1987.

184. That is, psalms 148, 149, and 150.

"A few years ago," one woman remembers, "When Pappoulis was still alive, I fell ill and developed a small tumor. My son went to the elder to asked what we should do, and he told him that I should go to Theageneio Hospital, which we did. They took me to the operating room, and a biopsy showed that the tumor was malignant. Six days later, the doctors told me that, if the wound didn't stop bleeding within a day, I would have to have an operation.

"My son went back to Pappoulis, who answered, 'Your mother shouldn't worry—it's nothing serious.' He gave him a prayer-rope, saying, 'Give this to your mother and tell her to pray with it and not to be afraid. Everything's going to be fine.'

"On the seventh day, while the elder was on Mount Athos, he appeared in the hospital! I saw him next to me taking care of the tubes that drain the blood. Before I could thank him, he disappeared. That night, the doctors came and found that the bleeding had stopped, the incision had closed up, and all the tests thereafter were negative. Neither pills nor chemotherapy were needed.

"Later, I met Pappoulis at the Holy Convent of Saint John the Forerunner, and I thanked him for coming to the hospital to visit me. He replied, 'My child, I came because you were suffering so much.'"

At other times, the elder appeared in people's dreams. This, in itself, isn't so remarkable—what's remarkable is that he would be aware of his appearance, and when he met with them, he would bring it up and ask if they had done what he had told them to do in the dream.

A parish priest named Father Basil provided the follow-

ing testimony:[185] "One summer in the Eighties, my health declined. I was sick the whole month of July. At the beginning of the Dormition fast, while I was in a daze from sleeplessness, the thought came to me that I was about to die. At daybreak, I fell asleep for a little while. In my dream, I saw Elder Paisios saying to me, 'You goof—you're not dying.' When I asked him how to get over my sickness, he answered, 'Humility heals it.' I felt a great, inexplicable, inner joy and a deep desire to visit the elder. That same day I left for Mount Athos, taking a friend with me to help me because of my illness. At Koutloumousiou, we asked a monk if the elder was at his hermitage. 'You're too late,' he answered. 'He just left a little while ago.'

"I told my friend that we should hurry. Arriving at the hermitage, we heard him call out, addressing me as 'Teacher.' (I hadn't been ordained yet.) 'Come over here, my child. You're the one I've been waiting for. How could I leave? So, where did we stop our conversation this morning?'

"'With humility, Elder...'"

185. Father Basil Virliou of Saint Luke Church in Stavroupoli, Thessaloniki.

Sensing Prayers and Entreaties

A reverent woman met the elder at a monastery and asked him, "Elder, do you hear me on Mount Athos when I call out to you?" And he answered, "What am I – deaf?"

As a matter of fact, he did hear, in a different, spiritual way, the entreaties and prayers of Christians calling on him from hundreds of miles away. He helped them invisibly with his prayer or sent them an answer in some way.

The elder once told us the following:[186] "There's this soul that I've never seen before. One time, when I traveled off the Holy Mountain, I met her elder and we spoke, and she was able to follow our conversation at a distance [by spiritual means]. She told her elder about it afterwards.

"Later, she sends me a three-page account of a 'conversation' she and I had while I was on Mount Athos and she was in the world. If I copied these three pages in my own hand and sent them to Souroti, the sisters would think that they're really from me – because they're my own words, as though I myself had said them. I didn't respond. I'm setting her letter aside so it'll eventually just be forgotten.

"A lot of times I feel I'm in a state where I'm perfectly con-

186. On April 22, 1978.

scious, but I'm not awake. I answer problems someone has when they call on me and I feel that they're near me, but I'm really speaking to a soul in need that's far away.

"I have the same experience even when people come here to the hermitage—I start saying things that aren't my own. This happens because people come to me with a deep reverence. They believe I'm a Saint, and God helps them.

"Some people can receive the grace of the Holy Cross from a log.[187] Then there are others that don't receive anything even from the actual Holy Cross.

"God isn't unjust to anyone. He disperses His love everywhere, so long as there's humility. That's what attracts the grace of God. And I think it's a real pity for a person to be consumed with unimportant things when they can help people so much this way."

A reverent mother had two daughters who were nuns in a well-known monastery, and she wanted her youngest daughter to become a nun as well. She prayed, entreating the elder. From Mount Athos, he saw her lifting up her youngest daughter and giving her to him, saying, "Take her too." Later, when he met her, he said, "I know her."

One Lent, while the elder was on Mount Athos, he sensed Helen Patera from Konitsa, giving him a warm loaf of bread. He felt its warmth and aroma and he felt like he was full. He thought how much she must love him, like her own child. It seems that, while she was taking bread out of the oven she was thinking about how she could send him a warm loaf of

187. That is, the elder is speaking of himself as the log.

bread as she used to do when he was at Stomio. The elder experienced this and later related it to her daughter, Katie.

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In 1981, the elder visited a spiritual child of his and he stayed the night at his hermitage. In the morning, the elder mentioned that that night he had felt as though the brotherhood of a particular Athonite monastery was in distress and was vigorously entreating him because they were going through a very difficult time. Later, it became known to all Mount Athos what had happened at the monastery that night. And in fact, as the fathers there told him later, they had been entreating him, asking for his help.

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"We went early to the hermitage of Hieromonk Paisios,[188] for the feast of the Annunciation," relates an Athonite monk. "We wanted to see the elder before the other fathers came for the feast. The elder was by himself in the guest house. When I saw him, he told me, 'Just now a woman appeared before me and was asking for help. She seemed to be very sick. Her face was thin and yellow like a lemon. She was in a lot of pain. Many times people appear before me and ask for help.'"

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"Some pilgrims visited Elder Paisios," recalls Charilaos, a customs officer from Thessaloniki. "He told one of them to go to a certain address and deliver a gift as a blessing to the store-owner there. When the man received the blessing, he was confused—he wondered how the elder could have sent it

188. That is, another monk named Paisios, who was a priest. The visitors knew that Elder Paisios would also be attending the feast.—eds.

to him, since the elder didn't know him. He prayed every night with a prayer-rope to the elder,[189] who, as the blessing he sent demonstrates, sensed it from so far away."

"In 1993, for the vigil of Saint Arsenios, my husband and I went to Souroti to see the elder," reports an anonymous woman. "There were over three thousand people there and it was very cold. We waited in line from nine o'clock in the morning until five o'clock in the evening. I saw that my husband was sweating and his face was pale, and I got scared. He had had heart surgery, and I hadn't brought medicine or food with me. I was afraid there might be something wrong. I prayed, 'My God, what should I do?'

"Suddenly, I saw a nun emerge calling, 'Excuse me—which of you is Mr. Aristeides, who has a problem with his heart? He's to come with me—Pappoulis wants to see him. He's wearing a beige shirt.' I then realized that the elder had heard my prayer and had seen us with another kind of sight!

"We went and got his blessing. It seemed to me as though he were as tall as the ceiling. He was smiling. He gave Aristeidis some advice and patted him lovingly on the back. 'And you?' he asked me.

'First, I want your blessing. Also, there's a photograph my son took of you secretly, when he went to Mount Athos, and I want your face to become clear.'

He looked at me and said, 'Dear woman, why do you want [a picture of] me?'

'You know,' I answered.

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189. This would likely have been using the words "Elder Paisios, pray for me."—eds.

When I arrived home, I anxiously went to look at the photograph. The blurriness that was there had disappeared, and the elder's face was clearly visible! I thank him.

"'Many times,' recalls one woman,[190] 'when I've been sick, I've made prostrations to a picture of the elder and told him about my problem. Later, when I'd see him during one of his trips, he'd tell me just what I'd said while looking at his picture.'"

The hermitage of Panagouda.

190. From Nea Moudania in Chalkidiki.

Knowledgeable about the State of the Reposed

By the grace of God, the elder, having a pure nous, was deemed worthy to see the souls of people at the time they were leaving the earth and ascending towards heaven. He also knew the state of some of those who had fallen asleep. When asked, he would answer about the soul of a departed person according to the state he saw it in. For example, he might say "God has granted rest to your mother's soul," or "You should do alms in his name," or "Let us pray to the Lord so He will grant him rest."

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The elder once said, "I wanted to know about the first nun who christened the cemetery in Souroti—what state her soul was in. They brought her to me in their arms"—and the elder demonstrated it, as though he were holding a baby—"and they told me, 'This is the soul of Magdalene.' She was in a very good spiritual state, as high a state as an ascetic I knew who practiced asceticism for years."

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Another time, he saw the soul of the nun Xenia, like a small child ascending into the heavens. This blessed soul, the daughter of a general named Maroulis, was a monastic in the monastery of the Holy Trinity in Koropi, and very humble and virtuous.

A police officer from Thessaloniki[191] tells the following story: "On June 8, 1986, while on duty near the Central Hospital of Thessaloniki, I was wounded by a Molotov cocktail. I sustained very serious burns. At Hippocrates Hospital, where I was taken, they left me, supposing that death was coming soon. I remained alive, but I lost all sense of my surroundings.

"From the moment Pappoulis learned of it, he said, 'He'll suffer a lot, but he'll live.' A few days later I regained my senses somewhat.

"One day, however, I felt that I was dying, and I said to the nurse, 'Sister – I'm dying, I'm dying.'

"I started ascending, leaving the earth, traveling amidst the stars and then the galaxies. This is how I interpreted what was happening to me as it was taking place.

"I kept ascending and ascending, and a light, something like a lit candle, went before me. All of a sudden the voyage came to a stop. I started moving in the reverse direction, towards the earth. I found myself in the hospital having had a tracheotomy performed, with doctors standing around me looking at me.

"Five months later, I met Pappoulis at Souroti. He embraced me and kissed me, and I began telling him how I died. He interrupted me saying, 'My boy, we went to the other life and back together. I was right next to you. Didn't you see me?'

"Then I understood what the light I had seen was."

One man relates: "I went to see the Elder after Pascha in

191. Angelos Horozidis.

1992. A few months beforehand my daughter Maria had reposed after a bout with cancer. Fr Paisios led me into the church, where I venerated the icon of the Panagia, and then he said to me: "Listen... I celebrated Pascha with Maria and many other souls". I looked at him in the eyes and he said to me again, "Yes, that's right."

Elder Paisios' stasidi (stall) at the church of his cell, Panagouda.

Clairvoyance and Foresight

Because he had the gifts of clairvoyance and foresight, at times the elder knew, by the grace of God, about the coming of visitors, their attitude, their spiritual state, their name, where they were from, their line of work, their past, and their future. He had a spiritual television, as it were, and at times he could see people who were far away—he would know what they were doing, how they were, and what they were going through. Other times, he knew what was written in a letter someone had sent him and responded without reading it, or he would know what a package contained before opening it.

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"When the war started in the Persian Gulf," he related once, "I felt pain while I was sleeping. I heard the thundering of the artillery, the bombs, and the planes, and I woke up. I realized that the war had started, that something very bad had happened. Afterwards, a father came from Koutloumousiou monastery and told me that the war had begun, and I replied that it had started about two hours ago. I felt the same thing on the third day of the war."

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"A middle-aged man came here," recalled the elder, "Who suffered with a bad headache for about a year, and

the doctors couldn't help. I saw him coming from a ways off, and right away I realized that he had a demon. He told me about his suffering, so I told him, "These things are happening to you because you cheated on a woman, and she went and had a spell cast on you. Plus, you've shamed another young girl. Go ask them to forgive you. Then go confess and have them read the exorcisms over you, and you'll be fine."

"In the summer of 1992 when I was still a layman," writes an Athonite monk, "I had a problem. I was in need of money because I owed three hundred thousand drachmas to my friends. I needed my father to co-sign for me so I could take out a loan, but he wouldn't do it, and I was really distressed about it. Having heard about Elder Paisios, it occurred to me to go and ask him about my problem.

"As soon as I saw him, he called me by name, and, without having told him anything, he continued, 'Your father took out the loan for you from Emporiki Bank.' I asked him, 'How do you know that, Father Paisios?' And he answered me, 'Since you don't believe me, go to Karyes, and call your dad to find out.'

"I went to Karyes and called my father, and he told me that he had indeed taken out the loan from the bank an hour earlier. I immediately went back to the elder's cell, made a prostration before him, and thanked him for the joy he had given me. He treated me to something and I left."

"One time," relates a layman,[192] "I was with pappoulis,

192. Evangelos Antypas.

and we were talking about job openings 'Pappoulis, I'm applying for a job with the National Health Assembly, and I don't have the qualifications they want.' He said to me, 'You should submit your application – the Panagia knows about it.'

When I visited him again, fifteen days later, he said, 'So, you were assigned to Charaka?'

'No, Pappoulis – what do you mean? I applied for Moires.'

He replied, 'You were assigned to Charaka, Evangelos.'

'Pappoulis,' I insisted, 'It was Moires.'

"Two days passed, and I received a registered letter in the mail from the ministry of Health with my assignment to the Health Center in Charaka as a supervisor. The elder had known about it before it had been announced.

While I was on leave from my post in Crete, Pappoulis asked me, 'Evangelos, did you get a transfer to Saint Demetrios Hospital?'

'No, Pappoulis. What are you talking about?'

'You got transferred,' he told me.

"I left. A month later I returned, and I told him, 'Pappoulis, I got transferred to Chalastra.' I had with me the government publication that had the announcement of my transfer. Pappoulis insisted, 'You're going to Saint Demetrios',' the same thing he said a month before.

"Four or five issues later of the same publication, my assignment to Saint Demetrios' was announced. Pappoulis knew I was going to Saint Demetrios' even before I applied for my transfer."

Basil,[193] a policeman from Aridaia, relates: "A friend of mine had gone abroad. Unfortunately, while there he got mixed up with some Protestants, the result of which was his renouncing Orthodoxy in favor of Protestantism.

"One day, he visited me at my office. Seeing the photograph of Father Paisios, he became frightened, and he said to me, 'I know him. Ten years ago I went to his hermitage with two other men. When we arrived he wouldn't let me enter – just me. He said it was because I'm a heretic, since I don't believe in the Panagia and the saints.'"

"My father went to the elder, and my wife gave him a letter to deliver," recounts a Cypriot pilgrim. "The elder addressed him by name, which left my father at a loss, and he forgot to give the elder the letter.

'Do you have something to give me?' asked the elder.

'No,' my father replied.

'From your daughter?' he added.

'What daughter?'

'Your son's wife is your daughter. Anyhow, tell her that the answer to her problem is' – and he answered what my wife had asked in her letter."

"During one of my visits to America," reports a monk,[194] "At the hospital where I was treated, a Cypriot woman named Katherine Kikis came and asked me to give a letter to Elder Paisios.

"When I returned to Greece and went to see the Elder,

193. Basil Tsolakis

194. Monk John of the Monastery of the Holy Trinity at Meteora.

before I even entered his cell, he said to me, 'Why did you take that letter from Katherine with the hundred dollars in it?'

"He opened the letter gave the hundred dollars back to me. I wouldn't take it – I said, 'Elder, what am I going to do with it?' He replied, 'You'll run into Father Zosima[195] on the road. Give him the money to buy his Schema so he can become a Great-Schema–monk, and tell him not to criticize me.'

"And, indeed, that's what happened: I ran into him and gave him the money. He was surprised because he hadn't told anyone that he was going to become a Great-Schema–monk, and he went and asked for forgiveness from the elder, because he had criticized him many times."

Occasionally, organizations promoting ostensibly philosophical and scientific systems – suspect both in the substance of their teaching and in their intentions – pop up in Greece like poisonous mushrooms. Once, a group of this sort was offering a series of lectures, and among the attendees was a man named Thomas, a resident of Ioannina.[196] He was also studying their literature, and what he read and heard was making him somewhat ill – a bit dizzy, mentally unclear, and generally confused. Torn and distressed, he was debating whether to continue, when a friend of his learned of his predicament and recommended that he go to Mount Athos to consult Elder Paisios. Convinced, Thomas headed off for the Holy Mountain. He

195. The name has been changed.

196. The name and place have been changed.

took with him a copy of the Holy Scriptures, which he put in the right outer pocket of his coat, and a book and pamphlet from the organization, which he put in his left pocket.

When he arrived at Panagouda, he found the elder surrounded by a crowd. He waited until everyone else left, except for two pilgrims, who wanted to see the elder privately. He was thinking of how to explain his problem, but the elder beat him to it:

"How's Ioannina?" asked Father Paisios.

"Fine, Father," Thomas replied. He was dumbfounded: the elder had never seen him before.

"Look, Thomas," continued the elder, startling the young man by calling him by his name, "that book in your pocket there" – and he pointed to the pocket that held the Holy Scriptures – "is good, and you should read it as often as you can. But the stuff you've got there" – and he pointed to the other pocket – "throw it away as soon as you can, because..." And he paused. "Well, does Ioannina have a mental hospital? If not, you're going to have to move."

"One time," recalls an eyewitness, "My aunt sent me to the elder in order to ask him to pray that they would have a child. When I arrived, he spoke to me in his warm, friendly way about a variety of spiritual matters. Finally, I stood up to leave, but he stopped me. 'Hey,' he said, 'where are you going? You came for something else.' Then I remembered my aunt's request, and I related it to the elder. He replied, 'Unless her husband fasts, confesses, and asks God for it on his own, they won't have children.'

'Elder,' I told him, 'he's not a believer. He makes fun of anything religious.'

'If he continues like that,' the elder said, 'they won't have children.' And that's exactly what happened."

Once, a group of pilgrims came upon a man trying to find his way to the elder's hermitage. The man, originally from Serres, lived in America. He carried with him a small bag, and among its contents was a book written in English. As soon as the elder saw the visitor, he invited him to sit on a tree-stump in the yard. "Hey, you – tall guy – have a seat in the armchair. What did you come to ask me – if there'll be a war, like that book in your bag says?"[197]

A man from Crete who was working in Germany had brought his son to study at the Athonite School. After he got him settled, he went to Panagouda to see the elder, something his spiritual father had suggested. They spoke, and at the end the elder, patting him affectionately on the back, spoke to him in a serious tone of voice. "Now, when you get back to Karyes, you should call your wife in Germany to put her mind at ease. People told her some dumb things about the kid, and since she's a mother she's worried. I'll make a phone call from here to my own mother," he added, referring to the Theotokos.

Being obedient to the elder, he went to Karyes immediately to call his wife, who was indeed very anxious. Some friends of hers had told her that she was going to lose her son: that the monks would deceive him and keep him on the Holy Mountain as a monk. Uneasy, she had called their

197. The fact that the book was written in English should be particularly noted.

spiritual father, who had gone to the house and tried, unsuccessfully, to calm her down. But as soon as she learned from her husband about the elder's miraculous spiritual television and heard what he had said, she became calm, marveling at the spiritual gift that enabled him, though on the Holy Mountain, to know what was happening in their house in Germany. The elder's "phone call" to his spiritual mother, the Theotokos, had helped bring peace to her anxious heart.

Archpriest Constantine N. Papadopoulos, a professor at the University of Athens School of Theology, relates a remarkable occurrence: "In the summer of 1981, or possibly 1982, I got off the boat to Athos at Daphne holding the hand of my son, who was six or seven years old at the time. Immediately, a layman I didn't know came up to me and told me to visit Elder Paisios on the following day instead of on that one. I was shocked that he knew my plans. When I asked him about it, I learned that he had earlier visited Elder Paisios, who had sent him there with instructions to relay the message to a priest he would see getting off the boat holding a child by the hand. The elder, who had made plans to go somewhere that day, had seen to it that I wouldn't go to the trouble of visiting him for no reason. May we have his blessing."

Often, while the elder and his spiritual children were together in the guest house at Panagouda, the bell would ring, and without looking he would say, "Open the gate—it's a guy from Larisa," or "There's Father Nikodemos." And he would be right. He didn't do it to impress them—often, it

was just spontaneous. Other times, he would do it for a specific reason, such as strengthening their faith or helping them to trust in his spiritual counsel.

It was the same at Stomio. He would be sitting with people in the guest house, and out of nowhere he would say, for example, "Basil and Demetrios are coming," and he would get up to cook or make coffee for them. The visitors would arrive as he had predicted, and the others would wonder how he could have known.

While walking with others, the elder might comment, "Here come three kids" – even though there was no one in sight. And indeed, after awhile, they would run into the people that he'd spoken of, making their way to his cell.

Once, some considerate visitors, arriving at Panagouda, quietly sat down behind some trees outside of the hermitage and waited patiently for the elder to come out. They didn't want to bother him by interrupting his prayer. A little while later, even though he'd never met or even seen them before, he opened his door and called out to them by name.

There were even some who contrived to experience the elder's clairvoyance, to experience "Christ speaking in" him.[198] They wanted to find out if the elder indeed had these gifts of clairvoyance and foresight. Once, for example, a policeman who used a radar-gun to catch speeders wanted to see if the elder's spiritual "radar" was working. When Father Paisios revealed the man's thoughts to him, it turned

198. 2 Cor. 13:3.

out it was *his* turn to get caught.

A reverent priest named Father John testifies to having the same experience: "I had known the elder when I was younger, and in 1979, I went to see him for the first time in at least ten years, and for the first time since I'd become a priest. There were a lot of pilgrims, and I thought that I would wait until the end so I could have a little more time with him. I decided not to tell him who I was, so I could see if he recognized me. Just as I was thinking that, I heard the elder say to me, 'Hey father, come over here! Father John, do you have any idea how long I've been waiting for you to come to the Mountain? Now you're in Serres. So tell me, how's your presvytera,[199] Theopistis?' [He emphasized her name.] I was stunned. The elder had instantly answered my thoughts and corrected me in a roundabout way. He knew my wife's real name, even though everyone knew her only as 'Pisteftoula (her nick name).' Humanly speaking, he didn't know her, and I had never spoken to him about her—my last conversation with the elder had been in 1969 at the latest, when I hadn't even known she existed. And how did he know where I was living when I hadn't talked to him? It was only just recently that I had been assigned to Serres."

The elder once commented to a nun, "I can see [from the Holy Mountain] that you're always reading the life of Saint Arsenios before your prayer rule—that's good."

Someone rang the elder's bell while he was with another

199. This is the Greek title for a priest's wife.—Trans.

monk, printing icons on his little press. Looking out the window, he saw a young man. He didn't open up though: he just continued with his handiwork. Three times he went to the window, studying the young man carefully. The third time, heartbroken, he said to himself, "See you, kid—be well." He explained to the monk, "There's no point opening up for him: he's turned his heart into a pigsty."

Once, the bell rang at the hermitage, and the elder looked out the window to see a layman waiting. He observed him for a little while, and then he said to himself, "He's got an epitrachelion*, but he's no priest." When they spoke, the visitor revealed that he practiced witchcraft and was wearing an epitrachelion under his clothing.

Another time, he foresaw the arrival of some young people who didn't have any spiritual motivation for their visit: they were just coming to see him out of curiosity. So he wouldn't waste his day with that, he took a small bag with a Psalter, locked up the hermitage, and went out into the woods, leaving a note on the door. It read, "Zoo closed. The monkey's out"—his response to being treated as an object of curiosity. Miraculously, the visitors were moved by it. They went to confession, and afterward visited the Holy Mountain for spiritual reasons.

A student at the Athonite School was visiting the elder when the elder asked him, "How many kids are in your family?" "Eight," answered the boy. "Wrong—" the elder replied, "there are nine." His mother was pregnant, but the boy didn't know it.

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"I met Elder Paisios in July of 1989, while I was preparing to take medical-school entrance exams," recalls an army physician.[200] "My goal was to get into the army's school, and a few months later, in September, I did.

"On the first day of school, someone from the student government was looking for me among the new students, calling out my name. I didn't know him, and he didn't know me. When we met, he told me that Elder Paisios had asked him to get me a place in his dorm and to take care of me.

"He asked me how long I had known the elder. When he heard that we had just met that summer, he said that, humanly speaking, that was impossible, because when he had spoken to the elder it had only been April!"

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One pilgrim recalls, "My daughter was getting ready to get married when, all of a sudden, she became ill with cancer. Her future husband was extremely worried, so he went to the Holy Mountain to see Elder Paisios. As soon as he arrived at Panagouda, the elder addressed him by name, saying, "In four days, the Lord is going to call Maro to be near Him.' And indeed, in four days my daughter Maro died, just as the elder had foretold."

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"I visited the venerable Elder Paisios for the first time in the summer of 1991," remembers a doctor from Serres. "We had saved some money, and I was facing a dilemma: should I buy an apartment with it, so we could stop paying rent, or should I give the money to charity?

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200. Dr. J. Moschos

"As soon as he saw me, before I could even tell him about it, the elder asked,

'Doctor, do birds have nests?'

'Yes,' I answered him, not pausing to think.

'So,' he replied, 'we understand each other.'

'May it be blessed,' I answered.

In obedience, having received my answer, I bought the apartment."

An anonymous testimony: "I was working in a restaurant in Germany, and every now and then I would steal from my boss. I felt a twinge of remorse, though, and, hearing about Elder Paisios, I went to the Holy Mountain to tell him about my problem and ask for advice.

"When I arrived at Panagouda, there were other pilgrims there. When he saw me, the elder took me aside privately, behind the cell. Before I could say anything, he took the palms of my hands and made the sign of the Cross over them, saying, 'From now on, quit doing what you've been doing, and go to a confessor.'

"I was deeply shaken. I confessed, and since then, with the help of God, I haven't stolen anymore."

A police officer from Thessaloniki[201] relates the following: "Once, while traveling to see the elder, I nearly ran into my superior from the Polygyros Police Department. It happened twice, once in Ouranoupolis and once in Karyes. He was a good man, but he was strict and too strait-laced. (I was supposed to be at my post in Kassandra in Chalkidiki by ten

201. Angelos Horozidis.

the next morning—which was impossible.)

"I tried to avoid him, but I wasn't sure if he had seen me or not. I went straight to the hermitage. As I took the elder' blessing, he said to me, 'Welcome. Don't worry—he didn't see you.'

'Who didn't see me, Elder?' I asked.

'The head guy—your boss from Polygyros.'"

"Once," recalls a priest from a town just outside Florina,[202] "I went to visit Elder Paisios with Father Theocletos, who's now Metropolitan of Florina. The elder welcomed us and gave us something to drink, and we started to have a very interesting conversation. People were hanging on his every word. Among other things, he said that the president of Turkey, Turgut Özal, would die in ten days' time, which in fact happened.[203] He also said that the Americans would bomb Serbia and that there would be a lot of damage, but that nothing would happen to Greece.

"At the end, we thanked him and took his blessing, and the others left. I had a request, so I followed him. Turning, he said to me, 'Oh, father—I know you're concerned about your son and the Australian girl. I've prayed, but she's not coming to Greece. Satan has probably won her over, because she has not repented of her decision. You should tell your son to wait another six months, and then get married. Indeed, the girl never returned. My son got married, and he now has two children."

202. Father Paul Trigonidis.

203. Ozal died on April 17, 1993.—eds.

A man named George writes,[204] "I and two other students from Konitsa met the elder in Thessaloniki. He had come into town for health reasons. He embraced us and, addressing me, said, 'Father Paul's out of danger. He's well now.' That was my father's name. It seemed strange to me: I didn't think my father was sick, and the elder wasn't in contact with anyone from Konitsa. But when I reached my sister by phone, I learned that, on the day we met the elder, my father had been in danger of dying."

A shop-owner named Demetrios[205] writes, "In January 1991, I became ill. I wasn't able to speak, and every day I grew worse. They ran a scan, which showed a 1.6 cm brain tumor.

"On my fifth day in the hospital, my brother and father-in-law decided to visit Father Paisios. Pappoulis received them, and they waited to speak with him, since there were a lot of people.

"When their turn came, before my brother could say anything, and without knowing about my situation at all, Pappoulis said, 'Don't worry. Demetrios will be fine. It's just a storm—it'll pass. Tell him to go to confession and receive communion.'

"After I'd spent fifteen days in the hospital, they did an MRI to get a better idea of what was happening. When the results came back, the doctor told me that the kind of cancer I had was usually malignant, but in my case it had changed shape after the therapy and would disappear in a little while.

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204. George Papathemistokleous.

205. Demetrios Bouroulidis of Kordelio, Thessaloniki.

And in fact, I was discharged forty-five days later, and I'm quite healthy to this day. Every day I glorify God, Who protected me through Father Paisios.

"Demetrios keeps a photograph of the elder in his store, and every day he venerates it with reverence and gratitude.

God revealed His will to the prophets in various ways, including through dreams, but the interpretation of dreams is not an easy task. Only with the grace granted to the Prophet Daniel and Joseph the All-Comely can one recognize "a dream ... worthy of believing."[206] "A lot of dreams come from anxiety and the devil can exploit them," the elder used to stress.

Sometimes, he would be informed during sleep about an event or about people who were about to visit him – he would know their names and their appearances, and the histories of their difficulties.

At the Hermitage of the Holy Cross, the elder saw his father according to the flesh in his sleep, who told him to clean the church. He investigated the little chapel, which was clean, and at one point on the wall he found a sprout of a fig tree that had just sprung up from the dampness.

"One day, at the Hermitage of the Holy Cross," related the elder, "I saw a young man in my sleep, and I even knew the problem that was troubling him. He was a good soul, but he'd been victimized, had some problems, and quit school. The next day, I waited for him. And, in fact, he came, and he

206. 2 Macc. 15:11.

was helped and left refreshed. He was from the region of Macedonia. I was so moved, and I felt for him so much, that when I found out about his problem in my sleep, I cried. It was one of the most complicated situations I've come across in my whole life."

Normally, it was during prayer that the elder learned about particular people. One time, he was informed that a demoniac was going to visit him the following day. He filled a cup with water, and dipped a relic of Saint Arsenios in it, making the sign of the Cross with it. When the man arrived, the elder treated him to some lumps of delight. The man asked for some water. The elder kept giving him pieces of lumps of delight—seven in all—to make him thirsty so he would drink the water. He did drink a little, but when he realized what it was, he wouldn't drink the rest.

"Once," relates an acquaintance of the elder's, "I went to pick him up at Ouranoupolis*. During the drive, the topic of accidents came up, and he turned to me and said;

'You were in an accident, too—but don't worry, you've got a lot of living left to do.'

'Elder,' I asked him, 'who told you that?'

'No one told me,' he replied, 'but I was praying when it happened, and I saw you. I was praying for people who are in danger of accidents. Don't worry—you'll live a long time.'

"In fact, I had been hit by a bus. I went to the hospital, but nothing was broken, though my legs were black and blue all over with bruises. I was there for two or three days. It was five or six days after the accident that I went to pick up the elder."

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Once, an acquaintance of the elder's brought him some gifts as blessings. "Why are you hauling that stuff out here," the elder asked, "instead of giving it to the poor?"

"There aren't any poor people these days."

"If I pick up my prayer-rope," replied the elder, "I can give you their names and addresses."

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One day, very early in the morning, Father Paisios knocked on the door of the cell of a hieromonk he knew. He answered, and the elder sadly asked, "Tell me, what did you do yesterday? Something happened to me last night. I felt weighed down, and I saw you wearing an apron like a grocer." Then the monk remembered that a sick person had come by the previous day and asked him to perform the unction service. Afterward, he insisted on leaving a little bit of money as a blessing. At first, the priest wouldn't accept it, but finally, so he wouldn't upset the man, he did.

"Go give the money back right now," said Father Paisios in an imperative tone, "so your sin will be forgiven." For two days, the monk searched for the man at different monasteries, and when he finally found him he returned the money. The elder was put at ease and was glad—he didn't want priests to take money from people who were sick or in pain.

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A spiritual father relates: "I went to the elder and mentioned to him that a certain woman was in a bad state—it was as though she'd fallen into depression and was at a loss. Being in a state of despair, she couldn't sleep for days. When the elder heard it, sitting on his wooden bed, he shut his eyes. It looked like he had fallen asleep, but he was praying.

Then he smiled, his face lighting up with joy, and said, 'It'll pass—it's nothing. She was oppressed because'—and he named her problem. 'She put a lot of pressure on herself, and that's how she ended up like this.' With that short prayer, he had learned everything. He spoke with certainty, and it was just as he had said. She had been oppressed by something, but now she's perfectly well."

The elder received miraculous enlightenment many times. While he was walking, speaking with someone, or working, he would receive a message from the Holy Spirit—information about something that had happened to someone far away. The elder, depending on the situation, would light a candle and pray or would himself hurry to help.

"We were going to Souroti with the elder," recalls an anonymous witness, "when he suddenly said to me, 'Turn around—there's a family breaking up right now.' We drove to a certain house in a certain city, and we found a couple arguing and dividing up their things. The elder spoke with them, and they made up."[207]

"On one of my many visits to the elder," relates a pil-

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207. An interesting spiritual conversation took place afterward. "If I were in paradise," the woman asked the elder, "and I had a son in hell, would I be able to see him? Would he be able to see me?"

The elder answered her, "If we're in a living room with the lights on, and it's night outside, we can't see out, but the people outside can see in. It's the same way in paradise—because if the people in paradise could see the people in hell, it wouldn't be paradise."

grim,[208] "I had my son, Constantine, with me. I said to the elder, 'Constantine mountain-climbs, and he even does very dangerous scaling on the rocks.'

"'Constantine,' the elder said, 'you can climb high [spiritual] mountains, because that's how you get closer to God. But don't go rock-climbing again, because it feeds your pride.' And the elder had a long talk with him, giving examples from his time in the army. When he saw us off at the gate, he kissed Constantine on the head and repeated, 'Don't go rock-climbing. But if you end up doing it some time, I'll pray for you.' Well, on the basis of that little opening, Constantine continued to rock-climb without telling us.

"In September, I made another trip to see the elder. There were a lot of people there; and, as soon as he saw me, he said, 'Sit here till the end, so I can tell you something important.' Afterward, he said, 'Constantine fell while he was rock-climbing. It was sixty-five feet from one anchor to the other, and the Panagia held him in her arms. I saw it with my own eyes.'

"As soon as I got back to the hermitage where I was staying, I called Constantine in Athens, where he was studying. 'Constantine,' I asked, 'did you fall during a dangerous climb?'

"'How do you know that?' he replied.

'I know.'

"Are there differences between people in paradise?"

"There are categories," he replied. "One person, let's say, has a thimble of joy, someone else has a glass, another one has a barrel, and another one has a whole reservoir. But, no matter what category you're in, you feel full."

208. Matthew Golias of Ioannina.

'Are you at the elder's?' he asked immediately. I said that I was, and he replied, 'Go thank him for me, and tell him that I'll sell all my equipment, and I won't climb again.' And that's just what happened."

The icon of Panagia Portaitissa.

The Gift of Healing

Saint Maximos the Confessor considers the gift of healing to be a result of love. "He who attains the natural love of man, after the total denial of love of self," writes Saint Maximos, "receives the gift of healing."[209]

The elder received this gift. He healed many whose conditions were incurable—people stricken with cancer, leukemia, heart troubles, paralysis, and blindness—and he loosed the barrenness of many women.

Many times, he foreknew the illness and its development. Often, if he saw faith in a sick person, and he saw that the person wouldn't be harmed spiritually by being healed, he could heal with a few words, saying merely, "You're not sick—you're fine." Other times, he would make the sign of the Cross over them with holy relics and would anoint them with oil from the lamp that hung in front of the icon of the Mother of God.

The elder related the following in a letter written in July, 1992: "Yesterday, they brought here a ten year old child who was completely blind. When I saw him, I asked him, 'My boy, what do you want Christ to give you?' He said, 'I want to be a

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209. *Pros Thalassion* 59, PG 90, 617C.

good kid'—and, before I could say a prayer, his blindness was healed."

As we can see, the elder (who told this story to comfort a blind person) told it in such a way as to conceal his role in the miracle. Another example of this habit of his was his practice of making someone well simply by stating that they weren't sick.

A professional diver was utterly in despair. His first son was born with an acute respiratory problem, and the doctors weren't confident of his survival. Someone suggested that he visit and entreat Elder Paisios. Full of anguish, but with an inner hope, he reached Panagouda. He found the elder sick, leaning against the wire gate in the yard, waiting for him. As soon as the elder saw him, he said, "I can't see you now, son—I'm in an awful state. Go and get your son from the hospital: there's nothing wrong with him."

Bewildered, the man wasn't even able to thank him. He burst into tears and started running toward Karyes. He called his wife, who, astonished, assured him of the miraculous turnaround.

This event took place in 1993. At this writing, over ten years later, his son, Thanassis, is very healthy. His father wasn't able to thank the elder during his lifetime, because it was shortly after this that Father Paisios left the Holy Mountain for good. However, he often expresses his gratitude at his grave, and he makes a pilgrimage to Panagouda once a year. The first time, he asked the fathers there if he could stay in the church for a little while in order to pray. A few minutes later he came out, moved, shouting with tears, "The elder's here! The elder's here! I was thanking him, and the

floor shook!"

A graduate of the Athonite School from Thessaloniki gives the following account: "Around 1989, a student of the Athonite School fell ill with cancer. They found a tumor behind his eye. One Saturday, before going in for surgery, he went to the elder with his father. In tears, the father requested the elder's prayers and asked him persistently if his child would get well.

"The elder told him, with certainty, 'Don't worry, it's nothing.'

"They left somewhat comforted. When they arrived for the operation that Wednesday, the doctors discovered that the tumor had disappeared. There was nothing there—of course, they were astonished.

"The father and son understood what had happened. That Saturday they came back to Athos, happy, to thank the elder. The father cried again, but this time with tears of joy, since his child's eye had been saved through the elder's prayers."

"In 1991 or 1992," relates a layman,[210] "I was at Panagouda with someone else from my town, named Polycarp. There were a lot of pilgrims there, and we were waiting our turn. I noticed someone sitting off to the side looking at the elder, who seemed to be really touched. I asked him, 'Did something happen to you?'

"Still moved, he told me that his seven-year-old daughter had spoken for the first time with the elder's help. Before

210. The witness is John Kortsinoglou of Konitsa. The name of his friend is Polycarp Kyparissis.

that, they had gone to a lot of doctors, even abroad, and they had spent a lot of money. The man was a teacher from Preveza.

"The elder verified the story when he was asked about it. He prayed for almost a year, and the parents helped, too. The Panagia revealed to him that the little girl would speak, and he warned the father so that he wouldn't be startled. On Holy Friday she hugged her father, saying to him,

'Good Resurrection, dad.'"[211]

"We were married in 1989," recounts a pilgrim, and for years we weren't able to have children. We had visited many doctors, but no one was able to help us.

Our childlessness was the reason for my visit to the elder in the spring of 1993. I wanted to ask him to pray about it. Father Paisios was accepting guests outside. When the time came for me to speak with him, he grabbed me by the arm and asked me what I wanted. I told him about our problem, and he answered, "Look, my child, your wife will have children. She's like a tree with a whole lot of sap – they slit the trunk a little, so it can keep its fruit." My soul became calm, and I felt like I was walking on air.

I felt such confidence in the elder's words that neither I nor my wife worried about whether we were going to have children. A year after his repose, a doctor told my wife that he would have to perform a minor surgery – in other words, that she would literally be "slit," like the elder had said. She later became pregnant, and Stella was born. We now have two other children, Demetra and Basil Paisios.

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211. This is a traditional Greek greeting on Holy Friday. – eds.

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"An acquaintance of mine had been married for fourteen years and hadn't been able to have children," recalls a hieromonk. "She was indignant about it, and she would say, 'Why won't God give me a child, too?' I mentioned this to the elder, and he replied, 'Well, let her have a kid so she won't grumble.' And, sure enough, she had a child within the year."

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"I wanted so much to have a child and to become a mother," relates a woman named Anastasia. "I had heard about Elder Paisios, his prayers, and his compassion for suffering people. In the spring of 1989, we visited the monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti, since Father Paisios was there.

"The elder was receiving people continuously, starting early in the morning. I was waiting my turn when it was announced that he wouldn't continue to receive people privately, but that he would only give his blessing to everyone there. But I had to see him and speak with him! I couldn't calm myself. I went to the nun outside of the modest room where the elder received guests. 'It's very urgent that I see him,' I told her. 'I won't keep him long.' She led me to the elder. He saw that I was upset, and he said to me, 'My child, be well—calm down. I'll pray for you. Leave what you've written,[212] and you'll have a child.' Within two or three months, I became pregnant. On July 13, 1990, a boy came into the world who was given the name Arsenios in baptism."

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212. What she had written was her request that she have a child.

"One day, in 1986," a woman recalls,[213] I noticed that my son, Constantine, who was two-and-a-half years old at the time, had some bald spots on his head. His hair was falling out—not all of it, but here and there. Naturally, I was concerned, so, when the elder came to the monastery at Souroti, the whole family went to ask him to pray.

"The elder looked at my son's head, made the sign of the Cross over it, kissed it, and gave him a hug. Then, lifting his hands, he looked up to the sky, crossed himself, and murmured something.

"We left, and on the way back to our house, ten minutes away from the monastery, I had an urge to examine my son's head. To my great surprise, I had the indescribable joy of seeing new hair growing on the areas that had been completely bald.

"Today, Constantine is twenty-three years old, and he has thick, full hair."

Father Paul, a priest from just outside Florina,[214] was told by the elder about a woman, the wife of an army general from Athens, who was sick with cancer. On the day that her surgery was scheduled, the general came to the elder in tears, asking for help. The elder told him, "Don't be upset, friend—your wife is well." The general believed the elder's words, received his blessing, and departed for Athens. At the hospital, the surgeon told him, "You must have a saint in your corner—your wife is totally cancer-free and healthy." The next day, the general went back to the Holy Mountain to

213. Sophia Stephanou of Kardia, a suburb of Thessaloniki.

214. Father Paul Trigonidis.

thank the elder.

"It was 1993, and I was very sick," recalls a man from Thessaloniki. "The doctors diagnosed me with cancer of the lymph nodes. Thus began my experience with hospitals, surgeries, and chemotherapy – one big, long nightmare.

"After we went through all this and there was still no improvement, the doctors recommended that I go home, since nothing more could be done medically. When I got home, I was an emotional mess, full of despair about my impending death.

"In the midst of this tragic situation, I turned to God to ask His help. Then a thought came to me that I should go the Holy Mountain to see Elder Paisios, and hope dawned within me. Accompanied by a relative, I managed – with hard work and in pain, because of my physical and mental condition – to reach Panagouda.

"There, we found thirty other people waiting to see the elder. They gave me a log to sit on, since I looked pretty sick and miserable. After about a half-hour, the door to the cell opened, and out came the elder. He welcomed the pilgrims with a good-natured expression that made a real impression on me. We sat on the logs, and the elder sat beside me. People started talking, and the elder answered questions with love and patience. Having the elder sit next to me was a blessing, and even more so when, later, he touched me with his hand. I didn't think I could tell him my problem, after taking his blessing in this unimaginable way.

"When we got up to leave, the elder said to me: 'You, my child, don't leave, I need you. Come inside the cell...'. Startled, I followed him. We went into the chapel and he told

me: 'Constantine, I know why you're here and the problem you're having.' I was blown away. And when he then asked to see the scars on my legs from the surgeries, it was too much for my mind to take. I couldn't explain, rationally, how all this was happening.

"The elder took some oil from a lamp and made the sign of the Cross on my legs. He told me to wait and he prayed for a few minutes in front of the icons. Then he told me, 'Constantine, God has had mercy on you. From now on, you won't have any more health problems, and whatever work you undertake in life will be blessed.'

"And truly, since that day, many years have passed, and I have never gone to the doctor, nor have I taken any medicine—not even an aspirin—and my work has gone beautifully. Glory to God.

"Unfortunately, I never saw the elder again. My work and my negligence prevented me from going to the Holy Mountain or to Souroti, where he stayed when he left the Mountain. However, my sister Helen once went to see him at Souroti. There were thousands of pilgrims who wanted to see him and take his blessing. Even though he was sick, he saw everybody individually. When my sister came to him, he complained to her: 'Why hasn't Constantine come to see me?' My sister it was at a loss; she couldn't explain how the elder knew that she was my sister.

"My sister told me what happened and chastised me. A few months later, I went to Panagouda, and I was devastated to learn that the elder had reposed. I castigated myself for my negligence, and I decided that, in order to make up for it, I would go to venerate his grave. With contrition, I venerated his grave, and for a blessing I took a little dirt and a flower.

I put the dirt in a little wooden box and laid the flower on top of it. That day, a beautiful aroma filled the room. The scent, which lasted the whole day, was so strong that we couldn't even stay in the room for very long. But what's most remarkable is that, after all these years, that little flower is still alive—it's never dried up."

The fact of the matter is that not all those who were ill and turned to the elder were healed. There were many occasions on which a sick person in front of him would become well before the elder had even managed to pray, but in other cases he prayed a great deal, but his prayer was not heard. This would happen for a variety of reasons. In one case, he prayed a lot without any result, and he realized that something was wrong with the situation. Asking the sick person, he found out what it was. He helped set the person straight spiritually, and then the person became well.

He told some people that they would never get well. Despite his insistent prayers, God would leave the illness as an elevated kind of asceticism, so that through patience they might gain paradise. "There are some people" he would say, "who God doesn't make well, so they won't lose their reward—like a father who doesn't give his fortune to his children so they won't waste it."

"When doctors can't help us, we have to beseech God, Who makes possible 'the things that are impossible with men.'[215] God knows what we need. And, if God doesn't listen to us, we have to know that God, Who is good by nature, wants something good to come out of it. Then we should just

215. Matt. 19:26.

ask Him to give us patience."

One such account comes from a man named Constantine, from Argos.[216] "For thirty years now," he reports, "I have been suffering from a chronic neurological syndrome that includes ataxia [that is, a lack of muscular coordination] and paralysis, and I am bound to a wheelchair. In the summer of 1981, I was a guest at the Holy Monastery of Grigoriou on Mount Athos. A Greek pilgrim, who was a big businessman, approached me and told me that he would assume the expenses for me to travel to America for care, since medicine there was advanced and they had already started doing nerve-cell transplants.

"The desire to stand on my feet and to walk again was kindled within me, so much so that the thoughts of trying the operation ran riot. I revealed my thoughts to the fathers at the holy monastery where I was staying, but they tried to dissuade me. 'Costas,' they said, 'be sensible—don't go stirring up trouble.'

'You think I'm stirring up trouble? You don't know what I go through!'

"The next day, accompanied by Father Timothy, I headed off toward Karyes to meet with Elder Paisios. I wanted to ask him if I should go to America. My meeting with him took place at five o'clock in the morning, in the old doctor's office in Karyes. The elder came there since it was very difficult for me to get to Panagouda because of my paralysis.

"The elder listened to my thoughts, and he crossed me on the head with the relics of Saint Arsenios of Cappadocia,

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216. Constantine Melitsos.

which he had with him. Then he grabbed my puny, paralyzed legs. Kissing them, he said, 'These little legs—they're going to take you to paradise, and you don't realize it.' And then he added, 'Don't go to America—they'll make you a guinea-pig!' As soon as I heard that, I was set at ease. Then, he looked me in the eye and said, 'Get up so we can take a walk.' I thought he was joking. He said it again: 'Come on—are you getting up or what?'

'Elder,' I replied, 'I can't! I don't even know how to walk.'

"He took me in his arms, helped me off the bed where I was lying, and we began walking. He was praying with tears in his eyes, saying something I couldn't make out. I felt like I had wings, and, seeing myself standing, I started weeping from emotion.

"Finally, he set me down in my wheelchair, sat next to me, and said, 'Listen, my child—God doesn't want you to get better ever. In fact, you'll get worse. But you should know that the people who surround and serve you are all being saved without realizing it—they help, and they're helped. You become a means for the salvation of their souls. This is what God is asking from you, so don't ever leave Argos.'"

"I had heard a lot about the elder," one man recalls, "So I went to visit him in 1991, because my daughter was sick. Doctors had found a tumor in her brain. They said it was benign and assured me that the operation to remove it would be a simple one. When I got to the elder's cell, there were a lot of people there. But, as soon as he saw me, he called me by name—without ever having seen me before—and he left the others and led me into the church. 'Let's go pray,' he said, 'because the Panagia wants Maria, and she's going to take

her.' I was speechless. With some difficulty, I started to speak: 'But the doctors—'. The elder cut me off, saying, 'Forget about the doctors.'

"So we went together into the chapel, where we prayed and made prostrations. When we finished, he told me: 'Brace yourself.' I was a mess from crying. I turned to look at him: he was glum. He gave me a hug and told me again, 'God gives life and God takes it away. The Panagia is going to take Maria.'

"As I was leaving, he told me, 'This stays between us. Don't tell Maria or your wife.' When the doctors performed the surgery, they found that the tumor was malignant, just as the elder had said. After a few months, Maria reposed—the Panagia took her."

There were also more difficult cases. "I pray for years for some people," said the elder, "but they aren't helped because they're obstinate and self-willed and have a lot of pride. They say, 'Why doesn't God give me this?' Well, why should He give these things to us? So He can make us even more proud and more willful? If He gives them what they want, it won't help them. When they act like that, it's like they're ordering God around. If they would say, 'If You want to, give this to me,' it'd be different. Prayer should be humble."

In a letter,[217] he comments, "There are a lot of times I've prayed about something insistently, appealing for myself or other brothers, and afterward I had to apologize to God and ask for the opposite. Now, I ask Him to give whatever is best for the soul, like a good father, since the whole reason for

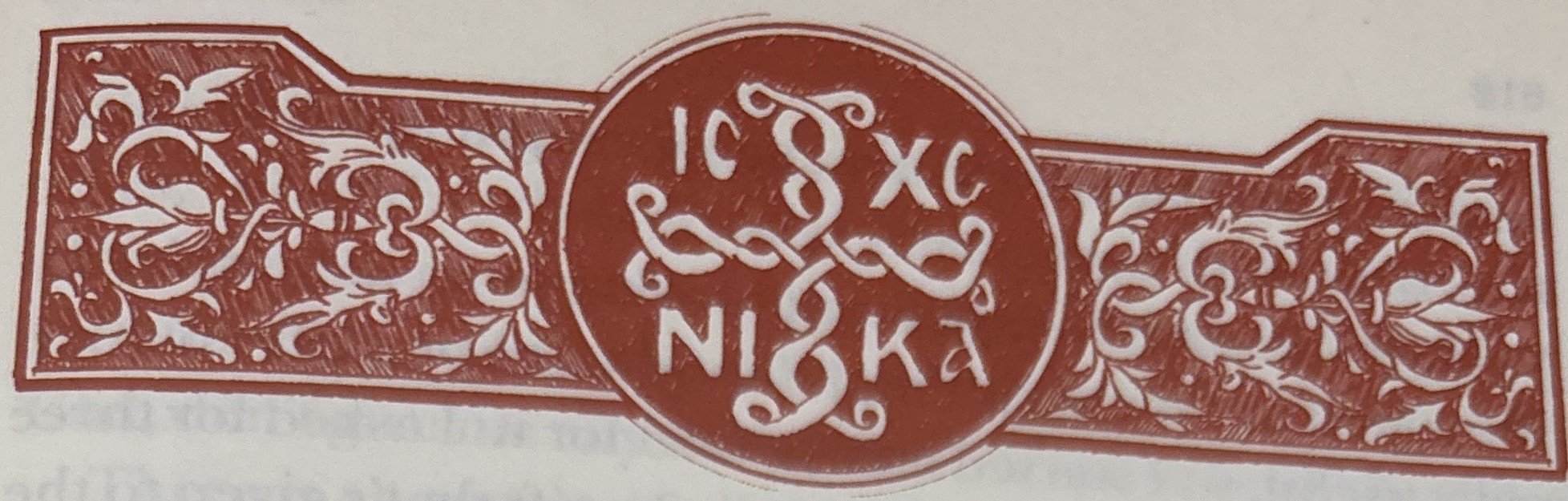
217. Dated September 18, 1967.

His sacrifice was to restore our souls to paradise, for them to be near Him."

The elder did not practice favoritism. The will of God is different for each person. Notwithstanding, everyone was certainly comforted and strengthened by the elder.

His goal was not only that a sick person should be cured, but also, and more importantly, that their soul would be saved. Of course, the greatest miracle for those who were healed is that they were strengthened in the faith. They became consciously faithful, their souls were healed of the passions, and they glorified God day and night. This has an infinitely greater worth than physical healing, and it endures forever. He wanted the sick to take part in their own cure, to make at least some sacrifice for Christ—for example, to abandon a passion for smoking, drink, or something else—to confess, to commune, and to live as faithful Christians. He didn't ask people to give generous alms, to build churches, and so on; nor did he impose on them " burdens grievous to be borne."[218] He left such matters to their own discretion. The elder rejoiced greatly when, along with their bodies, the souls of the sick were also healed, when their families were benefited and glorified God's name.

218. Luke 11:46.



Appearances of Saints

As mentioned earlier, the elder saw the Mother of God many times, as well as his guardian angel, many of the saints, and Christ Himself. He saw them, not in dreams, but during the day. He spoke with them; they venerated each other with kisses; and they gave him food with their own hands, healed him, made promises, and revealed mysteries.

He once told someone, "I read the lives of the saints a lot when I was young, but reading their lives doesn't help me as much now (meaning reading them), because I live them." He no longer needed that spiritual food, because he experienced something superior to it.

He avoided telling people about his experiences. He would only do this when he thought that it was necessary in order to help a soul. When he would tell stories of other sorts, he would be expressive and enthralling, but when he described his experiences with the saints, he would be quiet, reserved, and brief. The listener would stand amazed both by the uniqueness of his account and by its simplicity and naturalness. He might say, for example, "Something happened to me"—and what he would mean was that a saint had visited him. Or he might say that he "felt something." Hearing that, people would think that he had simply experienced an emotion, but what he meant was something much

deeper: a revelation, a vision, being caught up in divine vision, or something similar.

He once related a significant turning point in his spiritual development: "At one point, I thought that one gift would be really useful, so I started asking God for it. I asked for three years, and in the end I got it. It was a gift that's given to the great saints. But why on earth did I want it? It just made me anxious and confused! I realized that it wasn't doing me any good, so I started asking God to take it away from me. God nevertheless left it with me for three years, and it tormented me until He took it away. Do you think I dare to ask God for gifts now?"

On days that he had a miraculous experience, he usually noted it ambiguously in his liturgical books.

Even before he became a monk, the elder's nous had been caught up in divine vision many times during prayer. From his own experience, he could say, "When someone is caught up in divine vision, he can hear the alarm clock, let's say—something like that. He doesn't have more contact with his surroundings than that."

Speaking of visions, he said, "When someone sees a vision, he sees with the eyes of the soul. Sometimes, when I was having a vision, I'd close my eyes, but I could still see. So I saw with the eyes of the soul. When a saint appears to someone, another person there might see the saint, might only hear the saint's voice, or maybe neither. There's no law."

"At first," he emphasized, "a monastic experiences small events, then bigger ones, and then even bigger ones than that." (This, of course, is if they struggle in the monastic life properly and steadfastly.)

He had become a receptacle of divine grace. "Sometimes," he said, "when great grace comes, you can't bear it. The same way you can't charge batteries with more power than they can hold, often I'll get to the point where I say, 'God, don't give me any more grace, because I can't bear it.'"

There is an aspect of all this that is particularly impressive. The elder saw and lived so much, and he would "become ecstatic" – in the good sense, with divine madness – from the divine *eros* and heavenly sweetness left behind by his heavenly visitors. And, after all this, his nous was able to leave these heavenly things behind. It is not an easy thing to come down abruptly from Mount Tabor to the valley of weeping, for a person to sacrifice such a paradisiacal state to concern himself with people's problems. That the elder did this is a feat and endeavor worthy of wonder.

From the elder's allusions and the testimonies of others, we know that he had many more divine experiences than those already related in Part One. Some of these are recorded below.

Katie Patera reports that, during the elder's stay in Konitsa for therapy, he saw the Three Hierarchs[219]:

"In the evening, he shut himself in his cell and did Compline as usual. In the morning, he said to me, 'Sister, forgive me for bothering you all so much last night.'

'Bothering us?' I asked. 'How?'

'The Three Holy Hierarchs came and we had a conversation. I kept telling them, "Quiet, quiet – we'll bother the

219. St John Chrysostom, St Basil the Great, and St Gregory the Theologian.

family." I didn't want to bother you.'

I hadn't taken notice. He talked all night with the saints, and I hadn't realized anything."

It is certain that he saw Saint Catherine. He once revealed this to someone, when he saw that it would console the person. "Right away," he said, "I venerated her and embraced her feet. She's tall."

One evening in 1979, at Souroti, the elder had a vision.[220] It was indeed a vision, not a dream, and what he saw was the protection of the Mother of God, like a brilliant cloud, overshadowing and covering a group of nuns who had come to visit him from Serbia.

The elder also saw Saint John the Theologian. When he was asked what Saint John looked like, and whether it was with the eyes of the soul or of the body that he had seen him, he replied, "It was completely dark, and I saw him. These things are mysteries. Saint John the Theologian doesn't have that thing on his head so much, the way they paint him in icons." (Evidently, the elder was referring to the lump that is often portrayed on the saint's forehead.)

Elder Paisios was once asked why he wrote about Hadji-George. He answered, "If something hadn't happened to

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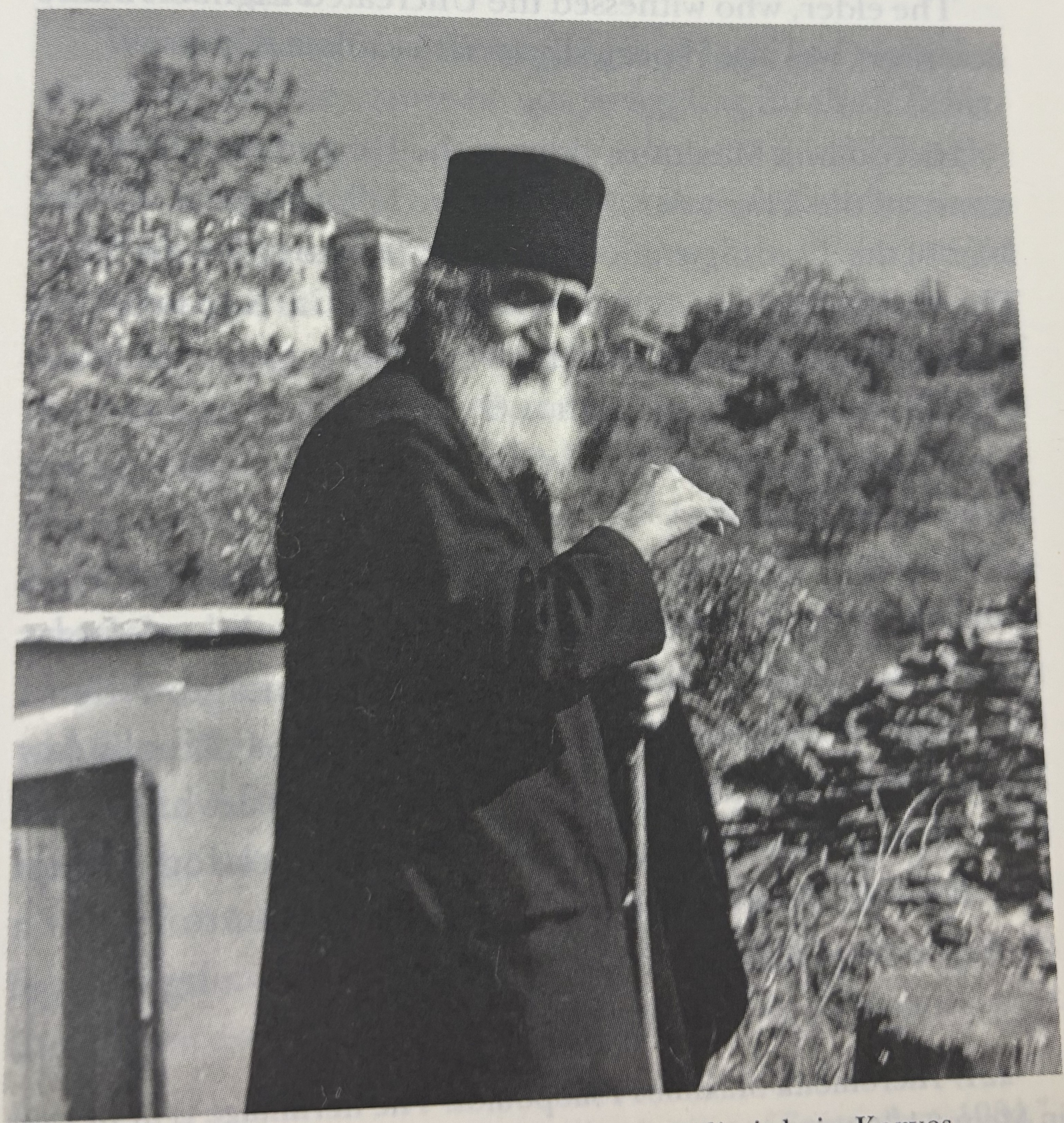
220. This incident took place on October 14, according to the old calendar, and October 27, according to the new. [In the Church of Greece, this is the eve of the celebration the Holy Protection of the Mother of God.—eds.]

me with Hadji-George, I wouldn't have written about him." Nevertheless, he didn't mention the appearance in his book. The reason was that, as he put it, "One time I got in hot water with Hadjiefendis," that is, Saint Arsenios, and this was because he'd published accounts of the saint's appearances to him. The elder held Hadji-George in great reverence. Personally, he considered him a saint and invoked his aid with his prayer-rope, and he believed that in time he would be formally recognized as a saint by the Church.



The Elder Paisios outside the cell of a disciple in Karyes.

A Beam of Uncreated Light

The elder, who witnessed the Uncreated Light on many occasions, was also repeatedly seen to radiate it himself.

Hieromonk Maximos, elder of the Hermitage of the Entrance of the Theotokos,[221] writes the following: "It was the feast of the Transfiguration of the Savior, August 6, in 1977. The elder had come to my hermitage in Kapsala that evening. I had guests at the time: two theologians who were High School religion teachers, G. Dilboes, an academic advisor, and Athanasios Vistas (who is now at our hermitage as the monk Arsenios).

"We had vigil, the elder chanting in his reverent, monastic tone, and then we set the tables in the refectory. Afterward, the elder departed for his hermitage. When I told him goodbye, before the break of dawn, I actually saw his face shining with light. He was radiating a white light, like the high-beam headlights of a car in thick fog, except that it didn't blind us. I didn't pay attention to it. But a thought was telling me that perhaps it was a light from

221. Hieromonk Maximos Psilopoulos. The hermitage is in Kerasia in Mount Athos.

heaven, like a gift from God on the feast of the Transfiguration. I grew quiet.

"I had asked the two theologians to accompany him until they reached the Hermitage of the Prophet Elias. When they returned, I heard them saying between themselves, 'What was that light?' Then they asked me, 'Did you see something on Father Paisios?' Then I added my two cents. 'I did see it,' I replied. And they told me how they had seen his face luminous and shining with an unusual light, unlike that of the sun, or starlight.

"We all believed that the transfigured Lord had rewarded His servant Paisios, since he was struggling for the transfiguration of his own self. And we glorified the Lord Who glorifies those who glorify Him. None of us said anything to Father Paisios himself. We hesitated ... were ashamed ... scared .... He departed for heaven without learning that we, wretched and unworthy ones, had seen him in the light of the Transfiguration. We are sure that he now finds himself in the light of the kingdom of God."

What follows is the written account of a brother who asked that his name not be made public:[222] "A spiritual brother of mine, his six- or seven-year-old son, and I decided to go to Athos. We were guests at the Holy Monastery of Koutloumousiou. After we received the usual treat in the guest house, the monk in charge led us to our rooms.

"We left our things there and went out onto the balcony, from where we observed the Holy Monastery of Iveron in the distance and, a little closer, pappoulis' little hermitage. It

222. It is dated, "End of August – beginning of September, 1984."

was three-thirty or four in the afternoon, and the bright sunlight lit up the whole area and the horizon. I was talking with my friend about various things, and we were watching his energetic son, who was climbing on the wooden railing of the balcony.

"At some point, I noticed an unusual light coming from the windows of pappoulis' cell, brighter than the light of the sun and somewhat different. The difference was in its intensity—which was greater than that of the sun—as well as in its hue. It was cleaner and more lucid, and it was gold but at the same time slightly bluish.

"This marvelous event lasted about ten minutes. The entire time I was asking myself if I was seeing correctly, if I was all right. Without stopping the conversation with my friend—whatever it was we were talking about—I watched this amazing occurrence and didn't say anything to him. Shaken as I was, I kept it to myself.

"I visited pappoulis in his cell for the last time at the end of September in 1993. I found him very worn down. While we were talking, I had a thought about telling the elder about the marvelous incident I had experienced in 1984. When I did, his countenance changed. His face became very joyful and sweet. After a few seconds, he said, humbly and bashfully, 'There are a lot of things [I could tell you], but it's not profitable for me to talk about them.' As I was leaving, I asked him if I had a blessing to tell people about the incident. He answered me, 'Ah, my boy, just let it be.'

An account of His Eminence Metropolitan Panteleimon of Xanthi: "It was very early in the morning after an all-night vigil at Panagouda. We read the service in the chapel. I was a

priest at that time, and I was serving liturgy while Elder Paisios chanted. It is impossible for me to describe what a gift that blessing was. The Divine Liturgy proceeded, and the time for Holy Communion came. The elder drew near in great reverence and humility to receive the immaculate mysteries. As he bent down, he removed his monastic cap, letting his hair loose. I was astonished to see that his face had become bright with obvious marks of divine change. He was emanating a bright, joyful light! It was an uncommon sight for me, and transmitted the sweetness of its divine glimmer within me. I didn't want to say anything. I keep his light-bearing countenance—ready to receive the Lord of glory—in my memory as a precious gift. I am relating it since it belongs, not to my insignificance, but to all those who seek solace from the light-bearing face of the elder."

Once, the elder commented, "I know a lot of people who could shine when they commune, but God doesn't allow it, maybe so other people won't envy them." Perhaps, behind "a lot of people" he hides himself, seeing as how there were also other times he was seen emitting a light while receiving Holy Communion.

Two air force mechanics visited the elder. "Where are you going to stay?" he asked them; but they couldn't remember the name of the monastery.

"Well," he said, "you'll remember it. What kind of work do you do?"

"We're aircraft mechanics."

"I used to know a mechanic named Xenophon," remarked the elder, and he put his head down.

"Oh! It's called Xenophontos*, the place we're staying."

It was two in the afternoon, and the sun was shining. The mechanic who related this incident also reported seeing a halo around the elder's head, brighter than the sun! Upon leaving, when they had gotten farther away from the door, he asked his friend.

"George—I've got to ask you something."

"What?" his friend replied, "About the halo?"

"It was the second time I'd visited the elder, in the fall of 1993," recalls a hieromonk.[223] "Father Dositheos the Romanian was with me. We went through the back door, and we found a lot of people in the yard. The elder was standing up, speaking with someone, and he had his back to us. When he heard our footsteps, he turned to look at us. What did I see before me! His face was shining—it was visible but in a light. I stopped before this unusual sight, and my heart was filled with much love and great joy. The elder looked very sweet. I'd never felt such love before. Then his face became normal again."

"At the neighboring Hermitage of Saint John the Theologian," recalls an Athonite,[224] "a monastic tonsure was taking place. Elder Paisios was present, and I was standing next to him. At the time of the Communion hymn, which he chanted, I looked over and saw that his head was shining like a light bulb. I couldn't look at him. It lasted for a short time."

223. Hieromonk Stephen of Lakkou Skete, Mount Athos.

224. Monk Alypios of Saint Anne's Skete, Mount Athos.

"During my first visit to Elder Paisios's hermitage," recalls an anonymous clergyman, "Which was the first time I'd seen him, I stood in front of his window for a little while as he prayed, without him knowing I was there. I heard him speaking, and loudly too. It seemed to be a conversation, a dialogue, more than a monologue. I saw him bathed in a blue light. A distinct blue ray was descending, fully covering him. He was larger than normal. Even his face was transformed: it was bright and also magnified. When I saw this scene, I didn't know that it was Father Paisios I was watching—later, I discovered that there was no one in his cell besides him.

"As I departed from the elder's hermitage, after these things, more and more I realized what a great gift I was made worthy to see and this filled me with joy and sweetness."

"It was 1992," recalls Father Paul Lampros,[225] "And we were having a vigil in Father Gregory's cell. I was a layman at the time. At one point during the Cherubic Hymn, I suddenly saw a powerful burst of light from behind me. I turned to look, and I was astonished to see Elder Paisios's face immersed in light and projecting light. Father Isaac was standing directly behind me. 'Keep your eyes up front,' he said to me. 'Which way is front?' I asked him innocently: I was in shock and had lost all sense of direction. The light lasted until the Great Entrance. I stood in awe and wonder. Tears of compunction ran down my face as I wondered how a sinner like me was considered worthy to see such a thing."

225. His name has been changed.

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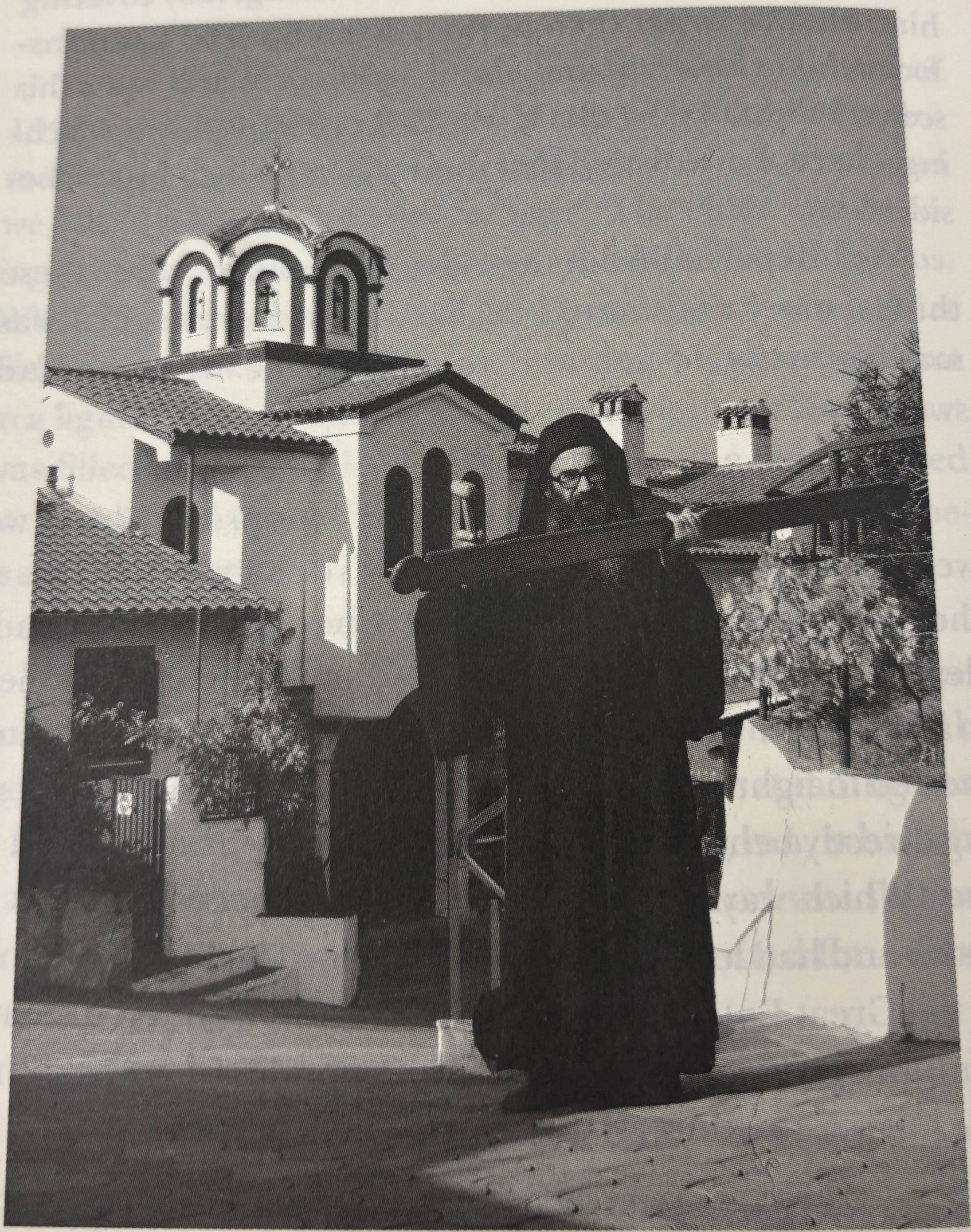
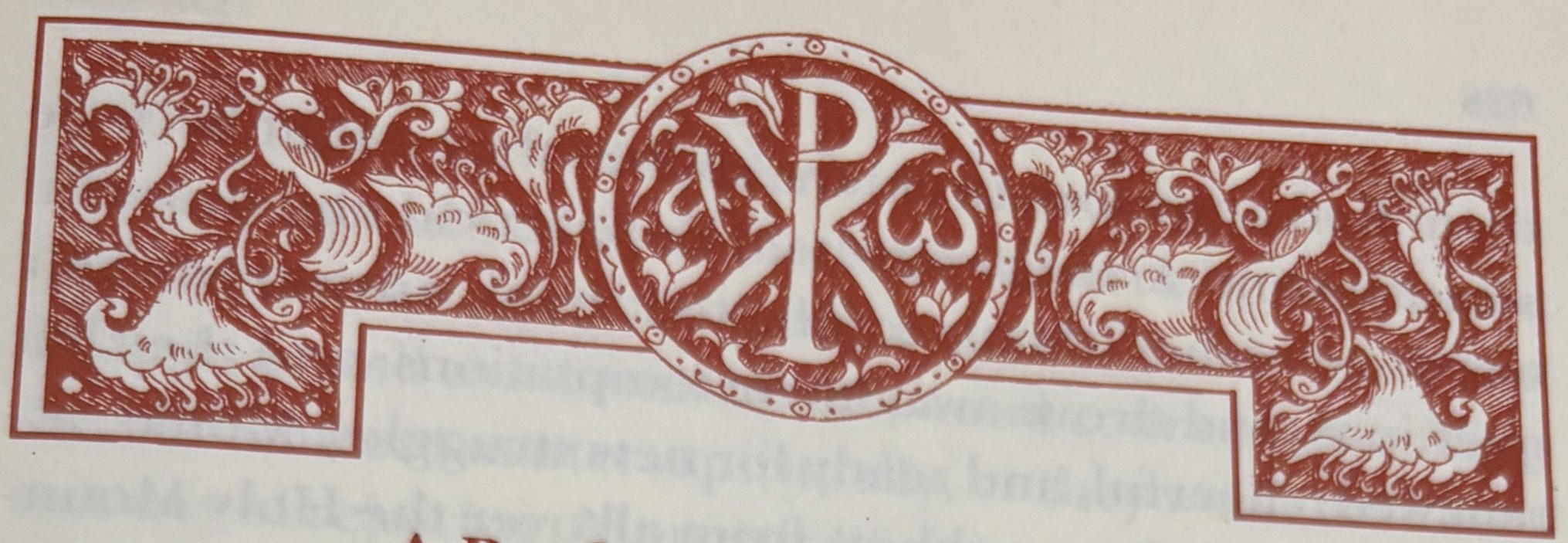
Even though the elder saw the glory of God and beheld the Uncreated Light, and even radiated this light many times, he tried to hide it and didn't speak about it. Someone once asked him about the Uncreated Light. "I've got a stove in my cell for light," he replied jokingly. "It's created."



A monk uses the talanton to announce the beginning of the divine services.

Offerings

The Elder with Elder Gregory and Eldress Euphemia
at the Holy Convent of Saint John the Forerunner
in the village of Metaporphosis, Chalkidiki.



A Professor of the Desert

The elder lived each of the forms of monasticism: in a coenobium, in an idiorhythmic monastery, in a monastery in the world,[226] in the desert, in a skete, and by himself in a hermitage. He was under obedience, filled with the tradition of the fathers of old, and he had much experience.

Out of humility, he didn't desire to receive any distinctions or positions of authority, and he didn't have his own brotherhood because of his spiritual sensitivity. "If I take on a disciple," he used to explain, "he deserves two hours a day with me. But with all the people that I see, can I spare that much time? Really—should I take someone on as a monk and then turn him into everyone's waiter?" In spite of all this, though, the elder emerged as a professor of the desert and a practical teacher of the monastic life.

The example of his remarkable life alone guides and supports the faithful even without words. Furthermore, the elder spoke and wrote in defense of the divine institution of monasticism, which is a spiritual safeguard and support for the Church.

The elder helped many young people prepare to become monks. When they were leaving the world, they would ask him where they should go. With discernment, he would help

226. That is to say, a monastery outside of the Holy Mountain.—eds.

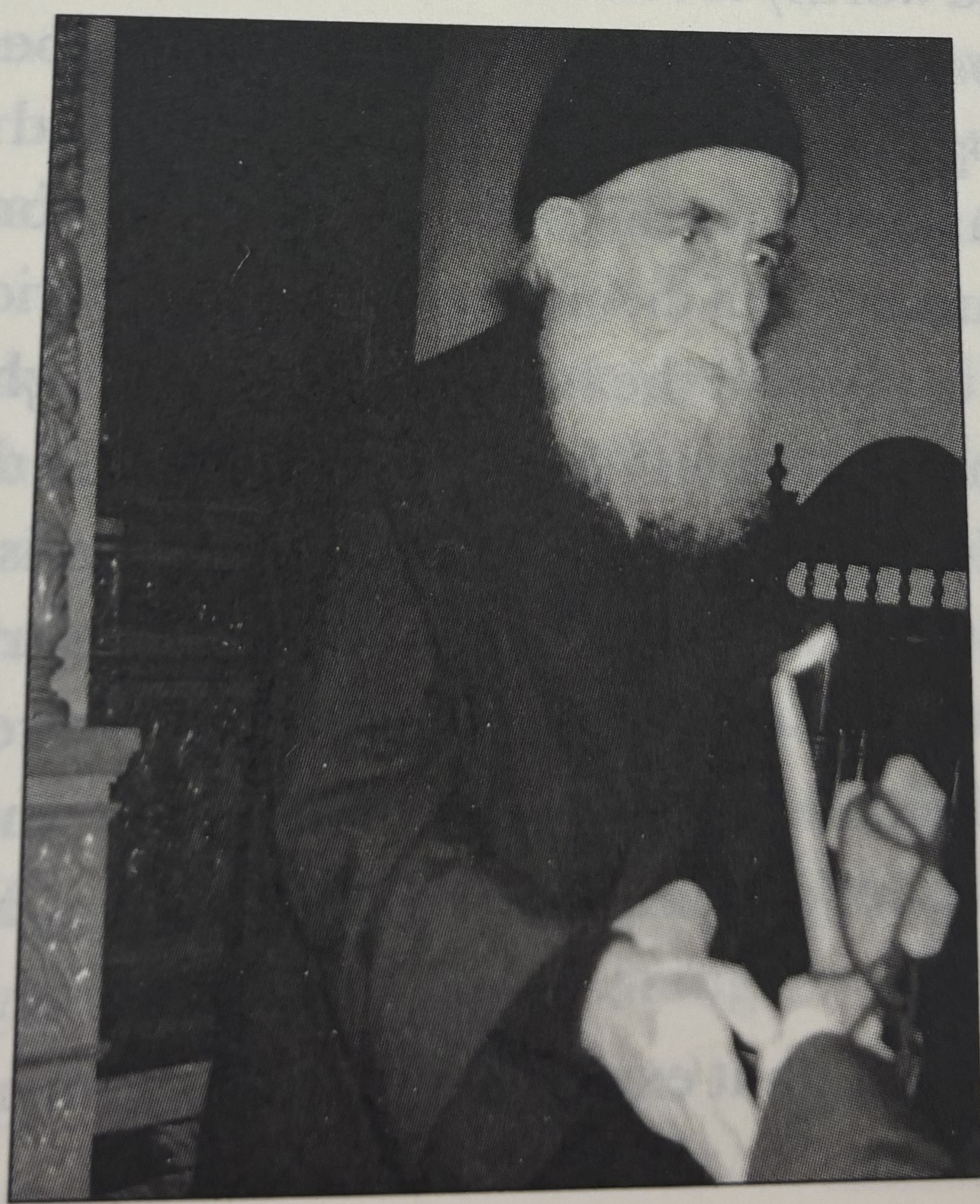
them find appropriate elders, so that they might become steadfast and make progress. His practical and graceful words refreshed them, comforted them, answered their questions, and drove away their temptations; and they left renewed, cheerful, and ready for new struggles. Monks, ascetic elders, and even abbots from all over the Holy Mountain would go to the elder. He was a trainer of monastics, because he was able to bear and to heal their thoughts. He was, behind the scenes, one of the most important factors in the repopulation of Mount Athos.

Many monks and abbots from monasteries in the world came to consult with him as well, some of whom he corresponded with. He did not seek this; on the contrary, he avoided taking monks and monasteries under his spiritual guidance. He didn't want to seem like an elder. Rather, he counseled all those who questioned him for the sake of their benefit, as a brother and in humble way.

Though the elder did not aspire to gain spiritual children, he did agree to help some emergent monastic communities in the world. He would do this only on account of special circumstances, out of obligation, in response to spiritual need, or due to divine providence—and even then with difficulty. As an experienced spiritual architect, he would give a rule of life, inspire a monastic spirit, and help the community to create an ascetic tradition. Under his spiritual direction, these monastic retreats grew quickly and now offer spiritual fruits. This is just what he desired and in accordance with what he would tell them: "Have your doors open and your arms open to give people spiritual relief. They're searching for something now, and, if they don't find it here in the monasteries, they'll go somewhere else."

This, in brief, was the elder's monastic ideal:

Monks should do their monastic duties, but they should also acquire the monastic spirit, a monastic conscience and attitude as well as a monastic ethos and countenance. They should confront matters spiritually, or they won't have even one day of rejoicing. Monastic life is an endless glorification of God. Work on the soul should come first, and then, slowly, the external work of building. Work on the soul doesn't weary you, and it also has the spiritual advantage of sanctifying your external work. The monk's goal is purity of heart: to become as delicate as an iconographer's gold-leaf and to pray for the whole world. We come to the monastery to live spiritually and to spiritually help all people. We don't become monks just to save our own souls, but for our fellow man.



The Elder present at a monastic tonsure.

Missionary Work from the Desert

The elder never wavered on the topic of stillness and its relationship to evangelism. He was, as he once described himself, a hesychastic monk. During a conversation about evangelism and hesychasm, the elder said: "Each person has his own calling. As for me, I love the desert."

And yet, despite being a hesychast, the elder was a preacher of Christ during his entire life. The great grace that he was deemed worthy to receive "was not in vain."[227] Performing his apostolic work from the desert, he helped a multitude of people, and so he was both an ascetic and a missionary. His evangelism was his outpouring of love for the world from an abundance of divine grace. Spiritually rich, the elder was able to nourish the hungry, just as though he were a man with material wealth feeding the poor. He didn't leave the Holy Mountain to teach or to become a missionary on faraway continents. Rather, he stayed in the desert practicing asceticism—and God led people from every continent to him. His missionary work was so important and effective, because it was an offering born of and accompanied by asceticism.

The elder's radiant example alone was a form of instruc-

227. 1 Cor. 15:10.

tion and evangelism. In fact, this example was his most important contribution. He showed himself to be a model of Christian life: he put off the old man and made the image of God in him to shine forth; and he became an imitator of Christ, "an example of the believers,"[228] and a living image of first-created beauty. With his life, he verified the truth of the Gospel and confirmed the existence of the supranatural events described in the Holy Scriptures. This feat is a valuable and timeless offering, and it legitimized what he said and did, endowing his words and actions with grace. Whatever the elder said, he had lived first.

The elder, like a pillar of light, leads people to the knowledge of God and guides them in spiritual struggle. He revealed God to men, and he proved that Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, today, and forever"[229] and that Christ grants His grace richly to those who are worthy. He showed that the supranatural events of Holy Scripture are real and within the Christian's reach. And his written inheritance serves as a perpetual sermon and a great help to monks and laymen alike.

The elder was glad when someone would tell him of their desire to become a missionary, and he would help the person to become a proper one. He considered it essential that missionary work start with oneself, and this teaching of his expresses the Orthodox understanding of being a missionary. One should first become holy, so that one might then sanctify others. The self is a keystone in missionary activity—if it loses its vigor, the entire undertaking is in danger. Conse-

228. 1 Tim. 4:12.

229. Heb. 13:8.

quently, the missionary's quest must be to receive grace and to become holy. It is from this moment that real missionary work begins.

The elder used to say, "This un-Orthodox spirit of missions is found among us, too. We don't look at ourselves, covered in stinking wounds; instead we think about how we can save others. This frivolous spirit gets in a monk's way. On the other hand, if we start with ourselves, which requires endless work, if we turn inwards, then the other person will be helped as well. I knew a Russian nun in the Holy Lands, at Saint Magdalene's, who preached with her presence and her silence. Divine grace gave her away—you learned just by looking at her. I even gave her my prayer-rope."

"There are hunters who cross valleys and hills," the elder said, "but they don't catch much. Other's are a bit smarter: they wait quietly by watering holes. Their thirsty prey come to drink the water and—bam!—just like that their sack's full. The monastery is the best thing for the spiritual life and for evangelism. People are really thirsty nowadays, and they'll come to the monastery on their own accord once they long for it."

Someone once asked him for a blessing to do mission work abroad, and the elder answered, "To go into the mission field and really get results a person has to be holy. It's not enough to know how to drive a car and so on—he has to work miracles! For example, when he meets some magician on the side of the road, he'll have to work a miracle so the poor person will believe in Christ." He told another missionary he knew to live in a monastery for a few years before going into the mission field.

He would urge: "When we have a priest who's reverent

and who loves asceticism, we don't have to put him into the world with the excuse that we're in need. When we have a potato, we need to plant it to get others instead of eating it right away."

The majority of his visitors were laymen. From the many years he spent occupied with their problems, he gained much experience. And, as an experienced doctor, he knew how to heal their spiritual illnesses.

Without being a "respecter of persons,"[230] the elder gave priority to certain categories of people. First, he attended to those who were in spiritual need and were ill and suffering. Next, he tried to help create good, Christian families. "Meeting Father Paisios," recalls one family man, "was the most important moment of my life. He made me a real person and helped me to have a good family." The elder considered a good family to be extremely important. "A lot of times," he would say, "all a person's problems start with his family. A broken home leads to loads of problems."

He encouraged spouses to lead a spiritual life, to have the same spiritual father, and to teach their children reverence by example. "The care a mother gives a small child is a very important thing," he said, "Because a child's upbringing determines the rest of his life. And if someone becomes holy and goes to Paradise, his mother gets a lot of the credit. That's why we'll see mothers above us there—it shouldn't surprise us. Imagine a mother has four children, and they each get, so to speak, an eight out of ten on their report card for Paradise.[231] Doesn't their mother, to whom they owe so

230. Acts 10:34.

231. The elder refers to the Greek grading system, according to which scores

much, deserve at least two of those points? Well, two by four is eight. Give her another two points for her own struggle, and she passes into Paradise with flying colors.

"The family shouldn't have a worldly mindset. They should live in simplicity, limiting unnecessary expenses and ostentation. It's good if only the father works and the mother watches after the children and the house." He stressed what a great help it is to have contact with other Christian families.

About the upbringing of children, he advised: "It takes a lot of prayer for children to get off on the right foot. We shouldn't show them our love too much, because they'll end up spoiled and obnoxious, but we shouldn't be too strict, either, because then they'll turn into rebels. The secret is to know how much slack to give them. Children shouldn't be part of adult conversations."

He paid special attention to young people. He toiled that they might find their way in life, live close to God, and have ideals and respect for others. Once, a rich man asked him for a blessing to start a charitable organization of some kind. The elder told him, "Let's get involved a little with young people"; and based on this suggestion the man started a foundation to help children with special needs.

The elder also helped those who held political office, not to flatter them or out of self-interest, but so that they would make use of their high position fairly and conscientiously in order to help others.

Among the elder's efforts to help his brothers struggling in the world was his attempt to write a book giving examples

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range from one to ten, with a score of five being a passing mark. – eds.

of virtuous laity. He started it, but his repose left it halfway completed. "Instead of talking about peoples' bad behavior," he said, "it's better to highlight the real stars." That is, it's better to point to virtuous Christians than to reprove people for their sins. "And fortunately," he continued, "there are quite a few. I know a lot of examples. They've reached purity, and, since the word of God is pure, they understand the Gospel and they can receive divine enlightenment. In their thoughts, they only condemn themselves." That is to say, they always blame themselves and justify others.

Without being a social worker or missionary, the elder helped many people from the desert, and he even helped foreign missions. Referring to the words of the Gospel, he said, "A time will come when a lot of people will thirst to learn about Christ and Orthodoxy. They'll stop us in the road and ask us about Christ, and that's how the Gospel will be preached in all the world. Then you'll be able to look for hours and not find even a single unbeliever."

Going out into the World[232]

As has been related, during one of his hospitalizations the elder met some young women who were lovers of the monastic life. Out of appreciation for their support during a difficult period of ill health, he helped them spiritually, which led to his founding the Holy Convent of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti. He would visit whenever there was a need. Later, he developed a routine of leaving the Holy Mountain two times a year, in the fall and after Pascha. "I took on a responsibility," he would say, "so I can't not go."

Giving spiritual assistance to the sisters at the monastery was the main reason for the elder's excursions. In addition, he had assumed the spiritual direction of the Holy Convent of Saint John the Forerunner in Metamorphosis, Chalkidiki, and he occasionally visited other monasteries as well.

At the beginning, he was faced with a dilemma. As soon as he would return to Mount Athos from Souroti, his thoughts would say, "What business have I got getting mixed up with nuns?" Then the following occurred: "I was at the dining

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232. This expression refers to the travels of an Athonite monk outside of the Holy Mountain. In Elder Paisios's case, this usually meant northern Greece; for example, the Holy Monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti, near Thessaloniki. – eds.

hall of a monastery, where there were great and holy fathers, and the abbot there was a Cappadocian. I had a seat with him, up front. Suddenly, he rang his bell and said to the reader, 'Stop the reading. We'll chant, because we've got someone here who's having tempting thoughts.'" Elder Paisios smiled when he heard that. He continued, "They started chanting something with a rhythm like a marching song, and the words answered the thoughts I was having."

The following account shows both the elder's reluctance to go out into the world as well as the love and obedience that moved him to sacrifice his beloved stillness.

"One time, I received a letter asking me to go out into the world to help. It was a serious situation, but I didn't want to go. I took my prayer-rope, and I went barefoot up to the peak of Athos to pray, for God to inform me as to what I had to do. I came back hours later, with my feet cut up and no word from God. I felt really awful inside.

"Then I decided to go get advice from an elder [Papa-Tikhon]. He told me that I had to go, but I still didn't want to. I went back to my cell, and there was a new letter, asking me to just write them, saying that that would sort everything out. I went to the elder again to tell him about it.

'No,' he told me again, 'it's better for you to go, for them to see you and hear it from you.'

"I decided to be obedient and go. And, right away, the weight was taken off my shoulders and the grace of God came. God wants us to ask for other people's opinions as much as possible."

At first, his trips would last about a week; later, he stayed longer. He would hurry to do what he had gone to do so that he could get back to his hermitage. Once, he visited a

monastery on Corfu. He arrived at night and didn't sleep at all: he saw the sisters, helped them in whatever way he could, and left in the morning.

When people heard that he was at Souroti, many raced there in order to consult with him about their problems and to get his blessing. They brought with them the sick and the suffering and waited in line for hours.

During the last years of his life the faithful who came to see him sometimes reached into the tens of thousands. They came from every part of Greece, from abroad, and even from faraway Australia, a convergence which is a rare phenomenon in the life of the Church. Many politicians, campaign managers, and rally organizers, who attract crowds by spending lavishly on advertisements and conventions, would have been jealous.

The elder, on the contrary, would leave Athos quietly, take care of his affairs quickly, and avoid people as much as was possible. But something roused people and drew them to him. It was difficult and toilsome for him to remain on his feet speaking with pilgrims in a never-ending line, and usually he was worn-out from his health problems. And, even though so many people benefited and so many miracles happened, he considered his excursions for the sake of others to be a departure from monastic strictness and from his chief duty, which was prayer for the world. He would say, "Putting ourselves out in front of the world is dangerous. If God does it, though, things are different, because then the grace of God goes before us and protects us."

When he would return to his hermitage, he would say, humbly, "My soul's as overgrown as this yard is." In order to clear his mind from impressions and images and return to

The Elder with a young man from Australia in 1978 at Souroti.

his spiritual rhythm, he would chant vespers in the chapel for a few days rather than doing it with the prayer-rope. He used to say, "Even though I leave the Holy Mountain for a spiritual purpose—not for myself or because I like it—coming back, it takes me three or four days in order to come to myself and get back into my routine."

He remained unaffected by the honor and reverence people showed him. "I was disgusted with myself," he said once. "Who am I for them to show me honor? I don't deserve those kinds of things. So I said, 'When can I finish and go back to Athos?'"

If he mentioned some pastoral examples and healings every once in a while, it was in order to teach or emphasize something. He applied himself to his fight not to lose a monastic way of life and interrupt his contact with God. He tried to forget all the things of the world, though not people who were suffering. He carried their pain and problems with him to Mount Athos, where he conveyed them to God with his prayer.

Many incredible things happened during the elder's visits. In order to show his way of helping others, a few of them, taken from his own accounts or those of other trustworthy witnesses, are recorded below.

"One time," recalled the elder,[233] "During a trip to Souroti, I asked the sisters, 'How are you on water?' They answered, 'Glory to God, we have water.'

"'Fine, you've got some. Have you asked the people if they have water?' That year, there had been a big drought. 'Let's do a vigil and pray so it'll rain.' And in fact, they prayed, it rained, the crops were saved, and the farmers rejoiced for the blessing God sent. I asked and found out that it had rained all the way down to Thessalia."

He related another time: "I made the sign of the cross over a female cancer patient with the relics of Saint Arsenios. A few days later I received a letter from her in which she thanked me because she became well and wanted to learn the saint's name."

233. This took place in 1976 or 1977.

A deeply reverent woman, a godly person from Thessaloniki, had developed cancer. She underwent many treatments, but the illness worsened, and it had even spread to the bones. She went to go see the elder in Souroti, and, as soon as she got his blessing, she asked him with anguish, "Elder, will I get well?" He answered her in the negative. The sick woman burst out in tears. Afterward, he spoke to her privately for quite some time. He consoled her and prepared her for her imminent repose. She left calm and peaceful knowing that soon she would depart from this life and that her path would be painful but blessed, which is just what happened.

When the elder lived at the Hermitage of the Holy Cross, some people whom he knew asked him to go out into the world and help them. A demon-possessed woman had unsettled the people of her city by making various revelations. There were many contradictory opinions, for some people considered her to be gifted and believed her words. The elder did not refuse the request for help. He only asked for the blessing from the local bishop. Without a blessing he wouldn't go. Immediately they intervened and the bishop mailed him a formal invitation. He went there, cleared up matters, and the devil was put to shame. The remarkable thing is the certainty the elder had about the success of his task. The only thing that bothered him was getting a formal invitation. Another time, when he received such an invitation from a monastery, he wrote to someone he knew, saying "No formal invitations! First of all, I'm not worthy of that kind of treatment. But even if I were some sort of educated man with talent and ability, I still wouldn't want it. (I mean, as-

suming I hadn't gone crazy, and I still had at least the little brain I've got now.)"

A doctor gives the following account:[234] "A man named Christos,[235] a representative for a pharmaceutical company, had a wife who was almost paralyzed from multiple sclerosis. In the fall of 1989, they went to see the elder at the monastery in Souroti. They wanted to get his blessing and for him to console her.

"When their turn came, her husband was holding her under her arms and wondering how she was going to get up the stairs. At that moment, the elder's voice was heard from inside, 'Stay there, Evangelia. Don't tire yourself. I'll come down ...'—he hadn't seen them and didn't know them. They talked, and the couple left greatly comforted and at peace."

"My wife made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem," recalls a man named John, "And it was there that she first heard about Elder Paisios. Later, when the elder came to Souroti, she went to see him and to tell him about a problem she was having. She was very upset because her hair was falling out. The elder told her, 'Don't worry. Go home, and in a little while you won't even be able to pull a comb through all your hair.' And, in fact, in two or three months, her hair had become very thick.

"This made quite an impression on me, so I went to meet the elder myself, on the Holy Mountain. He took me by the hand and told me, 'You haven't confessed in ten years.' And,

234. Chrysostom Papasotiriou of Thessaloniki.

235. His last name has been removed.

in fact, it really had been ten years since I had been to confession. In obedience, I went and confessed."

"It was December of 1987," remembers a young woman named Sophia.[236] "I was seven years old, and all my hair had fallen out. The doctors' diagnoses varied. Some said that it would grow back white; others said it wouldn't grow back at all. I tried many painful treatments without result, and each time I became more and more disappointed.

"My father went to visit Elder Paisios on the Holy Mountain. He advised my father and my mother to fast, and me too, to the extent that I could. 'God,' he said, 'has your daughter's hair in a savings account, and He'll give it back to her with interest—she'll have full, dark, curly hair.' The elder's words gave me joy and hope.

"Later, I met with the elder at Souroti. I sat on the floor and put my head on his knee. He stroked my head, saying that his hand was getting caught on my hair. (In fact, my head was still totally bald, so I felt his hand sliding right over it like it'd been shaved.) The radiance of his smile and the feel of his hand on my head are unforgettable. The faith that he gave me was indescribable. He advised me to fast every Wednesday and Friday and to commune regularly.[237] It was the most blessed day of my life.

"In 1996, big locks of hair grew in, 'full, dark, and curly,' just like the elder said.

I"t's worth noting that, a few years later, I visited the en-

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236. Sophia Papadopoulou.

237. Regarding the elder's teaching on childhood fasting, see note 40 p. 395 ("An unquenchable thirst for asceticism").—eds.

docrinologist who had treated me. As soon as she saw me, she cried and said that it was a miracle. She had told me that I would be able to grow hair again, but she hadn't really believed it – she'd simply been trying to encourage me."

"It was November of 1992," recalls a woman who wishes to remain anonymous. "My husband had post-surgical problems in addition to the ones he'd had already. That June, he had been operated on in Germany for the third time, for pituitary gland adenoma (that is, a benign tumor in the pituitary gland). He hadn't recovered his eyesight, he suffered from tremendous drowsiness, and, above all, he was depressed. The worried doctor urgently prepared for his admission to Hippocrates Hospital. On November 7, 1991 we visited the elder at Souroti. During the vigil, a nun came and led us to him.

"With great anticipation, reverence, and awe, we met the elder who was seated on a small bench. He immediately stood up, we kissed his holy hand, and I said to him, 'Father, my husband and I both have a lot of problems with our health. We're begging you – we need your help. About a year ago I had an operation on my breast.'

'O, what did they tell you? That it's cancer?' he asked.

'For them to do all that stuff to me – chemotherapy, radiation – well, it looks like it is, I guess,' I answered.

'Let them say what they will,' he answered me loudly and with certainty.

"I won't ever forget these words. They gave me support then, and they still do even now. They were the words of a grace-bearing, saintly man.

'I should also tell you about my husband now,' I contin-

ued. 'He's had three operations on his head and he's still suffering.'

'Well, it's nothing serious,' replied the elder.

"He took oil from the oil lamp, made the sign of the Cross on his forehead, gave him a Cross to kiss and advised him to commune. 'Don't mind her – she's causing all this,' he told him at the end. He was referring to me, and, indeed, I was panicking and making matters worse.

"I continued, 'Father, we also have a friend who went to London for a transplant, and the poor man is suffering.'

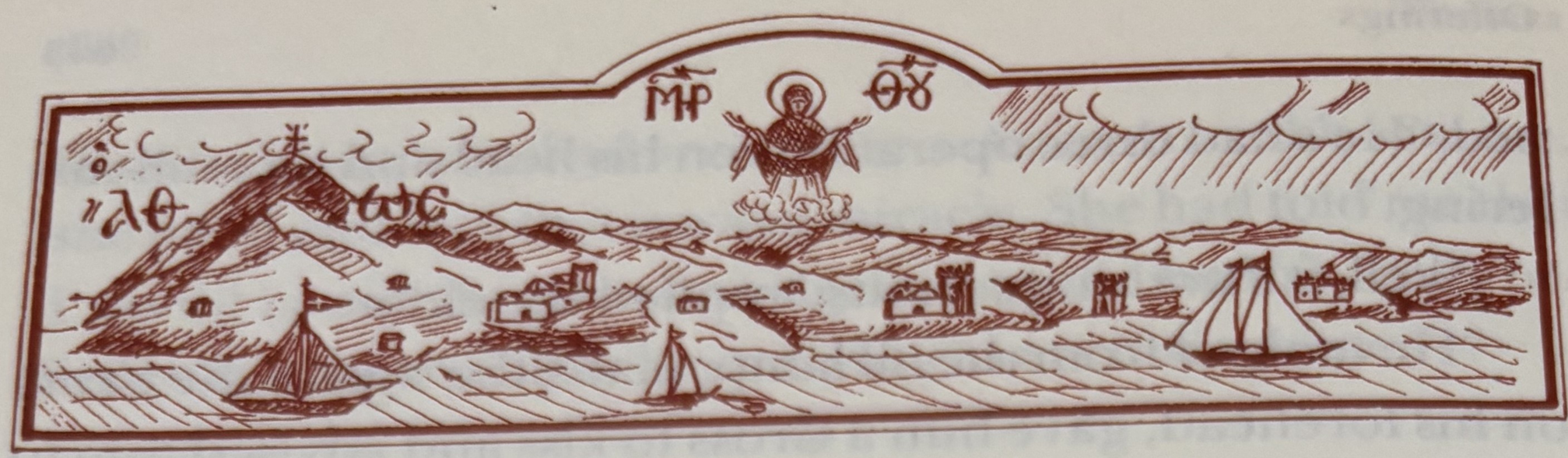
'What's his name?' he asked me.

'Stavros,' I replied.

"He didn't say anything else about our friend. He gave us four little crosses as a blessing, and he gave me a prayer-rope. We came out of his little cell changed people, light, as though on wings, filled with optimism.

"What really made an impression on me, what's engraved on my memory, is his face. The whole time we were speaking about our personal problems, his face was radiant, he was cheerful, and he had an air of joyfulness as though we were talking about happy subjects. His eyes had a certain light, like the light that the iconographers give to the faces of the saints. But the moment I mentioned our friend, his face changed from joyful to serious. My husband noticed it too.

"We mentioned it to a spiritual person who knew the elder, and he replied, 'Things will go fine for you two, but your friend ....' We understood from that that it wouldn't go well for him; and, indeed, he died after two months. We, glory to God, with the help of our pappoulis, are doing very well."



Defender of Tradition

The elder had an innate love and deep respect for the ecclesiastical traditions instituted by the holy fathers. He was—in the proper way—a zealot for the traditions of the Fathers. He rejected and condemned every modernistic proposal, such as doing away with the cassock, translating the liturgical texts into modern Greek, and modifying the fasts. Holy tradition in general was a matter of dear concern to the elder, and especially Athonite tradition, the subject now at hand.[238]

From the time he was a young monk, he searched out struggling fathers who kept monastic tradition and lived a spiritual way of life. All that he heard and learned from them he struggled to make part of his life. He later recorded some of this material in his book, *Athonite Fathers and Athonite Matters*.

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238. On the Holy Mountain, that blessed place of unceasing worship of God, the most honorable treasures of our faith are preserved: the Holy Belt of the *Panagia*, pieces of the Holy Cross, holy relics, wonderworking icons, manuscripts, and many other sacred objects. Together with these, and just as precious and honorable, is the treasured, millennia-old monastic tradition: the tradition of asceticism and the worship of God as a way of life. What the holy fathers lived in the deserts of Egypt, Sinai, Palestine, and Syria, and in the monasteries of Constantinople and Olympus in Bithynia—this survives today, not only in the libraries of Athonite monasteries, or in the architecture, music, and liturgical typicon, but also in the life and the asceticism of the Athonite fathers themselves. Stillness,

He would often bring up the tradition of the fathers of old in conversation, comparing how they lived and struggled to contemporary life. He used to say, "We have to compare ourselves to the saints, to see if we're following in their tradition, instead of to those next to us, so we'll come out looking like we're more traditional. For example, you have a mule, and you say, 'I'm more traditional than someone with a car.' But the saints carried everything they had on their backs, which wore out their bodies and trained them in virtue."

"We have an obligation," he stressed, "to preserve tradition, simplicity, and asceticism, so that those who come after us will find something here."

He looked at the Athonite tradition in its entirety. He didn't unilaterally preach the tradition of any single elder, nor did he create his own "school," because he didn't believe that he was some sort of Atlas upholding the Holy Mountain—the only possessor and conveyor of Athonite tradition. Having studied for decades and benefited from many elders, he naturally spoke about and passed on this tradition to younger monks. He described the atmosphere which prevailed on Mount Athos on his arrival as follows: "In the past, you'd come to Athos and see the Gerontikon* in action.

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holy relics, sacred objects, manuscripts, and even the ban on the entrance of women, exist elsewhere as well; sometimes, perhaps, even more notably than on Athos (for example, in the Holy Land and Mount Sinai). But an uninterrupted monastic tradition of so many centuries, among such a number of monastics living all the forms of the monastic life, is found only in the Athonite Community: in this respect, Mount Athos is unique.

In the modern age, provision has been made for the restoration of the monasteries, for the cleaning of the frescoes, and for the preservation and safeguarding of the sacred objects. What effort is being made toward the preservation and blossoming of the fragile Athonite tradition?

You'd meet fools for Christ, saints, simple little elders at great heights, and deluded people. Today, we have a different delusion—what you get is European civility. Nowadays the fools for Christ and the saints are gone, and we have rationalistic people. Nothing good has come out of this generation. I've experienced that blessed atmosphere—if I hadn't, I'd have died from longing. But knowing about it makes it painful for me to think about the situation now—to compare it to how things were in the old days. Then, there was a movement toward the good, toward struggle; now there's a movement toward worldly things. It pains me when I see watered-down monasticism and fake politeness.

"Monasticism is mainly tradition. The new monk studies under an elder in order to learn the way of life and asceticism that his spiritual guide received from earlier fathers. Thus, the stream of tradition runs from elder to elder, proceeding from the first ascetics of the desert."

Father Paisios encouraged monastic aspirants to go either to a monastery or to a spiritually skilled and sensitive elder, so that they could learn the monastic life, not from books, but from practice. As he would say, stressing the benefit of the novitiate, "No one learns anything from themselves. These kittens here are smart, because they've been trained by their mother. This other one, poor thing, is an orphan, and it's like he's lost—he doesn't know anything."

He urged young monks to visit the old Athonites and to talk to them about spiritual matters, writing down what they would tell them. "The authors of the Gerontikon and the Lausaic History*—you see what dangers they would go through to talk to the fathers of the desert. Today, you can go do it easily—and, on top of that, they even treat you to

something when you get there."

It was very instructive to see Father Paisios asking other elders about their rule and how they struggled, simply for his benefit. Afterward, despite the fact that his asceticism was actually greater then theirs, he would censure himself, saying that, in comparison with others, he did nothing. He often, and always with reverence, mentioned the Athonite tradition. He considered it both precious and fragile, like a tree with a tendency to dry out that has only a few green branches left.

Such was the elder's approach to the ascetic and neptic tradition of the Holy Mountain: reverent and marked by a lifetime of learning, and much struggle, to live this tradition and pass it on unchanged to younger monastics.

The elder was against the worldly mindset, way of life, and outlook. "The worst thing of all," he said emphatically, "is the worldly spirit."[239] He regarded this as the funda-

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239. The Evangelist John the Theologian writes about the world: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (1 John 2:15–17).

The holy fathers use the term "world" to refer to sin and the passions, but they chiefly use it to refer a worldly mindset, to caring for and clinging to things that are worldly; that is, those material things that deter us from spiritual life. "Have no love in your soul," writes Saint Isaac, "for anything which is connected with those in the world" (*Homily* 17, p. 95). For, as he states elsewhere: "This world is a harlot who, by lust for her beauty, entices those who behold her to love her. The man who in part is possessed by love for the world, and is enmeshed therein, cannot disentangle himself from her embrace until he divests himself of his own life. When the world has stripped a man of everything and thrust him from his dwelling in the day of his death, then only will the man understand that

mental cause of the relaxation of the monastic tradition, and he believed that it can harm a monk even more than the devil.[240]

Worldly things are naturally highly detrimental to monks and naturally unsuited to them. But the elder believed that even Christians who live in the world should not have a worldly spirit.

His word, "as fire ... and as an axe cutting the rock,"[241] discerned and separated the worldly from the monastic, even in cases where others confused them. This was something he cared about deeply.

"Today," the elder observed with sorrow, "you can see how the world's influenced monasticism. This is what the prophecies talk about—how monks in the end times will be like laymen, and laymen will be like demons. There are, however, exceptions." For this reason he admonished, "Today, monks need to be really careful about lax monasticism so that they don't get dragged away by the undertow. The harm happens slowly, and you get led astray without even realizing it. These days, the worldly spirit has even influenced the monasteries, and now monks think they can live comfortably, and become holy while working as little as they can."

The elder, a promoter and bearer of the genuine spirit

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she is verily a deceiver and beguiler .... In this manner the world holds sway not only over her disciples, her children, and those that are held in bondage within her, but also over non-possessors, ascetics, and those who at one time severed her bonds and rose above her." (*Homily* 37, pp. 164–165)

240. "Ease and idleness are the destruction of the soul and they can injure her more than the demons" (Saint Isaac the Syrian, *Homily* 48, p. 235).

241. Jer. 23:29.

of the fathers, considered distraction to be detrimental to a monk's way of life, even destructive. Distraction comes about when a monk is not occupied with spiritual matters, but gives excessive attention to the "part-time jobs" of the monastic life—for example, focusing too much on handiwork, appointing luxurious buildings, rather than simply performing necessary renovation, or celebrating feasts in a showy way. Avoiding hard work and pursuing comfort and convenience are similarly destructive.

Once, the elder prepared to leave Stomio because they wanted to extend the road all the way up to the monastery and install a gondola. The convenience of it might have delighted someone else, but the elder's criteria were different.

Regarding one elder who was lenient with his monks, Father Paisios commented, "They can rise up to his spiritual state, so why shouldn't they—instead of him lowering himself to where they are?"

Once, he observed some unfitting items in a hermitage. "What are these worldly things?" he asked the elder there. "People gave them to me," he replied, justifying himself. "So," retorted Elder Paisios, "if I give you a dress, will you wear it like a cassock?" He wanted monks to live simply and with awareness. In one monastery, he saw wall-to-wall carpeting and recommended that they take it out. On his next visit, he was happy to see that they had removed it. But he also said to someone, "They took the carpet out of here. But if they don't take it out of their hearts, they'll just end up putting it somewhere else."

He once referred to a monk who had visited him from the desert. The monk had joyfully told the elder that he had installed a telephone, and he had begun enumerating its

many benefits—first of all, that he would have more time for prayer, since he could order the things he needed from Daphne and avoid the hassle of traveling there himself. The elder didn't agree with this way of thinking, and he answered the monk as follows: "I know it's convenient to have a phone. And the more worldly things you have, the more ease you have. But did we come here for these conveniences? Well then, it would have been better for us to stay in the world, where we'd have more of them."

He gave another example: There was an elder who lived in a cell with his disciple. He said to his disciple, "I want you to make a few little crosses for handiwork and pray a lot." But the monk leaned on his elder until he let him learn iconography. Over time, they started getting a lot of orders, and they bought a lot of furniture and enough vestments for thirty priests and three bishops. The disciple died recently. Before he died, I visited the hermitage. He was alone, and, since he was a little old man by then, he was having a hard time taking care of himself. The armchairs and the rest of the furniture were filthy. That's how things wind up when we abandon praying and do our own will.

"Hadji-George," the elder would add, "avoided giving an obedience to many of his disciples. Instead, they would dedicate themselves more to prayer and do prostrations on behalf of the whole world."

Once, some prominent dignitaries toured the Holy Mountain. At the end, they went by the elder's cell. "Those of us who live in the world," they commented, "have amenities and worldly things. We came here to see something different."

He counseled monastics, "People should be led to emu-

late us monks when it comes to spiritual development—we shouldn't emulate their worldly development."

He further counseled, "When the monk doesn't mature in spiritual things, he doesn't find consolation. Then he begins to desire worldly things, and, since he can't use them like secular people do, he's tormented. Worldly things and the worldly spirit will bring desolation, just like it did in Egypt. Today, archaeologists find reliefs of hunting and so on in monastic cells of the Thebaid from the time of Emperor Zeno. When simplicity was lost and the monks started to be occupied with things like that, the desolation of monasticism followed."

Concerning Mount Athos, he said prophetically, "You'll see—these large buildings some people are building will end up laid to waste. People won't stay there even if someone pays them to. They'll just take the building material to make little hermitages."

"Today," he concluded, "there's a lot of material to work with, because a lot of young people are coming to be monks, but there's only a little yeast. We're not the way God wants us to be, and these young people who come don't have examples. What's missing is example."

He also noted a further difficulty that young monks have in keeping the pure monastic spirit: "The young monks who are coming here now are people of the highest caliber. It's the first time in the Holy Mountain's history that people of such high quality have turned up here. These young folks are educated, cultured, and refined. Unfortunately, they're not utilizing these advantages. They go to church, light the chandelier, and spin it like a top while they sing 'Servants of

the Lord, Alleluia.'[242] And then it's, 'Okay—let's go take a rest.' That's not the monastic life. But you don't dare speak to them about it, because they won't put up with anything. They're really spoiled, you see. Over the slightest thing, they'll say, 'How can he talk to me like that? He was so rude and inconsiderate.' They're lost in their pettiness. And there's one reason: they haven't really experienced any pain or suffering in their lives."

The elder ached for the Holy Mountain, and he fought that it should remain a quiet and spiritual place that renounces the world while still remaining hospitable. He fought for it to be detached from the ruinous influences of the world, that it might remain holy and produce saints. Full of hope, he would stress, "They'll return to the tradition. You'll see fancy cars turned into chicken coops and young monks living in caves."

He wanted monastics to restrict themselves to the indispensable and not to waste time and energy on unprofitable and vain things, becoming spiritually withered.

The elder's stance on tradition wasn't strict, rigid, and unyielding—he sensed the value of tradition, he lived it, and he foresaw the fruits it would produce in the long term. He had the discernment to condescend to human weakness, though without going too far. He would say, "For someone to add a spoonful of oil when they feel weak, I can understand that. For someone to put an extra piece of wood in the stove—okay. For him to have an animal, when he needs it—

242. The elder is referring to the Polyeleos hymn, psalm 134 (135), which is sung during Matins on Feasts of the Lord. As it is chanted, the chandelier is swung.—eds.

well, anyway. But we've overdone it. What 'life of asceticism' do we 'desire'[243] and what world did we renounce, when we keep the whole world inside ourselves [that is, when we have a worldly mindset] and when we fill our lives with every comfort and convenience? And the worst thing is, instead of deploring ourselves, we make ourselves out to be more discerning than the holy fathers."

He set an example with his blameless way of life. He didn't even have a kerosene lamp: at night, he used candles. For the pilgrims, he piped in water from a spring, but for himself he fetched water with a bucket and filled a tapped cistern on the terrace. When he was asked why he didn't use a hose to bring water inside the cell, he answered, "Am I so stupid that I can't connect a hose and have water indoors? I don't do it because it isn't spiritually helpful." Some, when they heard that the elder had an open-air guest house, imagined a sort of formal space with armchairs. Instead, they found rotting logs on the ground, and yet this simplicity gave them rest. "This is what we were looking for," they would say. Even though the elder was a capable builder—he had the knowledge and skill—he never tried to build any "lovely little hermitages,"[244] but instead the house of his soul. Instead of whitewashing his cell, he constantly whitened his soul with struggles and prayer. His little hermitage was simple and old. His cell, blackened by the many candles he had lit, had spiders. "They help me spiritually," he would say, "because they remind me of the caves where the holy fathers lived.

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243. Elder Paisios quotes from the service of the tonsure to the Schema, in which the monk, asked by the priest why he is present, replies that he "desire[s] the life of asceticism."—eds.

244. This is an expression of Saint Nilus the Myrrh-streamer.

Worldly things transport you to the world."

The elder was moved by the simple, ascetic, and poor things: all that befits monastics. Provided with a warm topcoat made of expensive fur, he immediately gave it away, preferring to wear a cheap hair-cloak. He willingly deprived himself of many things others would consider necessities. But this deprivation brought spiritual comfort. "For divine comfort to come, the other, false, consolations have to be absent."

According to Abba Isaac, "The man who becomes destitute of the things of this world will be rich in God."[245] These few words express both the spirit of the elder and the goal for the sake of which the monk must shun worldly things. The elder expressed this very beautifully, in a simple and aphoristic way: "Good heavens. We came to the desert for the Uncreated Light, and now we're running around after created ones."

245. *Homily* 15, p. 86.

The Mother Church

Saint John the Evangelist and Theologian had three mothers: his natural mother, the Theotokos, and the thunder—in that he was named "Son of Thunder" by the Lord. The elder, too, had three mothers: in addition to his mother Evlogia and the Theotokos, he also felt the holy Church to be a true mother. Indeed, she is the mother of all the faithful, since she gives birth to them a second time in baptism and nourishes them with the grace of her Mysteries.

The elder particularly stressed this relationship. In a letter to a young man, he wrote, "After you finish your studies, do whatever sets you at ease within the bosom of the mother Church."

He was a monk with an ecclesiastical mindset and ecclesiastical conscience. His ecclesiological views were completely orthodox. He believed that the Church possesses the entirety of revealed Truth. He used to say, "Whatever belongs to the Church is spotless." The salvation of humanity is attained in the Church. The elder felt himself to be one of her members, and he subjugated his will and sacrificed himself for her good. Even his asceticism had an ecclesiastical outlook. "When I correct myself," he believed, "a piece of the Church is corrected." His love for the Church was immense. He endured labors and sacrifices for her stability, prayed incessantly for her glory, and struggled in a multitude of ways for

her unity. He wrote, "I'm not one of those who have made the Orthodox Church of Christ into a political party. I love Christ's workers and I help as much as I can."

He helped many young people become good clergymen, workers in the vineyard of the Lord. "Work humbly in the Church," he advised them, "and the Lord will make you known to the people." Some of them now adorn the hierarchy.

He wanted the clergy to prepare the people with repentance, that they might avoid the righteous wrath of God. Their service is to aim at the salvation of the faithful and the glory of the Church, not at ostentation. Of a cleric who had accomplished some praiseworthy work, the elder remarked "this work would have had value if it hadn't been something personal."

He himself quietly followed, with interest, the state of the Church from his ascetic's hermitage. He would pray, speak, write and, when he deemed it necessary, go out into the world for the sake of some ecclesiastical concern. In one such case he went to meet with the Archbishop of Athens, Hieronymos I (1967-1974), and another time he went to visit Metropolitan Augustine of Florina. "Monk," the bishop said to him, "did you come here to correct me?" "No, Your Eminence," he answered. "The Gospel says 'if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault'[246]—it doesn't talk about your father." He made a full prostration before the zealous metropolitan and then told him something. The metropolitan accepted what the elder said, and he held him in high esteem ever afterward. A number of

246. Matt. 18:15.

bishops consulted him and sought to communicate with him.

He was greatly pained by scandals and ecclesiastical crises. At such times he would increase his prayer. "I wrote to you about my great pain," he stated in a letter during one such time,[247] and he explained why these things happen, "The fatherly, spiritual nobility is missing and the next thing is that we argue over nothing."

Commenting on the much-discussed topic of the religious "organizations" in Greece,[248] the elder said, "Let's not abolish these Christian organizations—let's refashion them according to the Patristic spirit."

The elder abided by the sacred canons and the order of the Church. He respected the principles and the customs of Mount Athos, and he would not leave the Holy Mountain without written permission. One time, he was at Souroti, and his episcopal permit for travel expired.[249] He had urgent business in another city, but he stayed where he was, waiting two days for the arrival of a new permit.

He revered and respected bishops. Once, an acquaintance invited him to his house. "I can't come, of course," replied the elder, "because first we'd have to go to the bishop to get a blessing, and that would waste a couple of days."

"Elder, why do we have to go to the bishop?"

"No," he answered, "we have to, because he's the general,

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247. Dated April 12, 1975.

248. Such independent Greek "organizations" are sometimes called "brotherhoods" and "sisterhoods," though their members are not monastics. At their outset they were markedly influenced by Protestant peity. —eds.

249. Strictly speaking, a monastic or cleric must acquire episcopal permission to travel from one diocese to another. This rule is rarely observed in modern times.—eds.

and we're just simple soldiers."

He particularly respected the Ecumenical Patriarchate. He was aware of the pan-Orthodox mission of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, and understood his difficult position. He prayed often for him and defended him in public on many occasions.

From what has been related about the elder's time at Stomio, it is clear that he was an resolute opponent of heresies. In matters of faith he was exacting and uncompromising. The Truth is not up for negotiation," he said. "The Truth is Christ."

He fought against ecumenism and spoke about the magnificence and uniqueness of Orthodoxy, obtaining his information by divine grace within his heart. His life attested to the superiority of Orthodoxy.

Discerningly, he stated, "There's no need for us to tell Christians who aren't Orthodox that they're going to hell or that they're antichrists; but we also mustn't tell them that they'll be saved, because that's giving them false reassurance, and we'll be judged for it. We have to give them a good kind of uneasiness – we have to tell them that they're in error."

Orthodoxy was extremely important to him, and this is why he didn't accept the practices of communion or common prayer with non-Orthodox people. "In order for us to pray together with someone," he stressed, "we must agree on the faith." He cut off relationships with and avoided seeing clergy who participated in common prayer with heterodox. He didn't recognize the "sacraments" of the heterodox and advised that those coming to the Orthodox Church should be well-catechized and then baptized.

For a time, together with almost the entire Holy Moun-

tain, he ceased commemoration of Patriarch Athenagoras in response to his dangerous overtures toward the Roman Catholics. However, he did it with pain. "I pray," he once told someone, "for God to take days away from me and give them to Patriarch Athenagoras, so he can fulfill his repentance."

He considered the Anti-Chalcedonians (that is, the Monophysites) – along with the other heretics and those of other religions – to be creatures of God and our brothers according to the flesh, in terms of our common descent from Adam; but he did not consider them children of God and our brothers according to the spirit, characterizations he believed applied only to Orthodox Christians.[250] Regarding the Monophysites' sympathizers and their fervent supporters among the Orthodox, he observed, "They don't say that the Monophysites didn't understand the holy fathers – they say that the holy fathers didn't understand them. In other words, they talk as if they're right, and the fathers misunderstood them."[251] He considered proposals to erase from the litur-

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250. The Fourth Ecumenical Council was held in Chalcedon in 451. The council taught that Jesus Christ had two natures, divine and human. Those who rejected this teaching became known as Monophysites, from the Greek words for "single nature." The council decided in favor of the dogma of two natures in Christ, and it condemned those who rejected its authority and persisted in their errors, expelling them from the Body of Christ. The various communions descended from those who rejected the council have been known by a variety of names, including Monophysites, Non-Chalcedonians, the "Lesser" or "Separated" Eastern Churches, Copts, and Jacobites; and in latter times by other names, including Miaphysites, Henophysites, Pre-Chalcedonians, and Oriental Orthodox. The conclusions of the Fourth Council were affirmed at the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Ecumenical Councils, and the fathers of the council are celebrated yearly on the Sunday between July 13 and 19. – eds.

251. The elder refers to the claim among supporters of union with the Anti-

gical books statements identifying Dioscorus and Severus as heretics to be a blasphemy against the holy fathers.[252] He said, "So many divinely enlightened holy fathers who were there at the time didn't understand them, took them the wrong way, and now we come along after so many centuries to correct the holy fathers? And they don't take the miracle of Saint Euphemia into account? Did she misunderstand the heretics' tome too?"[253]

Without trying to seem like a confessor of the faith, the elder, in his own way, expressed his opposition regarding

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Chalcedonians that the disagreement at the Fourth Ecumenical Council was essentially a tragic misunderstanding, the holy fathers there present failing to consider that people of differing backgrounds sometimes use different words to refer to the same thing.—eds.

252. Dioscorus was among the leaders of the anti-Orthodox at the Fourth Council, and Severus was one of the council's most fervent critics. Both are regarded as saints by Anti-Chalcedonians (Monophysites). The Church's liturgical texts, however, speak of the Fourth Council's victory over heresy, some specifically identifying Dioscorus and Severus as enemies of the faith. A union of the sort the elder rejected would require all these references to be deleted; and, in general, a rewriting of liturgical texts, saints' lives, and educational literature touching on the Fourth Council.—eds.

253. The Church at which the Fourth Council met housed the relics of Saint Euphemia, and, after prolonged discussion failed to produce an agreement, it was decided to place each party's confession of faith (or "tome") in her tomb and supplicate God to reveal His will in the matter through His saint. The imperial seal was set on the tomb and a guard appointed, and those present spent days in fasting and prayer. When the tomb was opened in the presence of all, the tome of the Orthodox was found in the saint's right hand, while that of Dioscorus and the other Monophysite's was at her feet. This miracle is commemorated by the Church on July 11: "O Euphemia," reads one hymn, "Christ's comely virgin, thou didst fill the Orthodox with gladness and didst cover with shame all the heretics; for at the holy Fourth Council in Chalcedon, thou didst confirm what the Fathers decreed aright" (*Great Horologion*, p. 541).—eds.

various matters, speaking to and writing ecclesiastical figures. "The Church," he would say, "isn't the ship of each bishop to do with as he pleases." These reactions of his were accompanied by much prayer and love, not only for the Church, but also for those who were deviating from the faith; and all was the fruit of dispassion, discernment, and enlightenment from above.

Another issue that concerned the elder was that of the divisions in the Church caused by the change in the ecclesiastical calendar. The split was a source of pain for him and a topic for prayer. He felt sorrow for the Old-Calendarists* factions, out of communion with the patriarchates and other autocephalous Churches, branches cut off from the Vine. Some such parishes in Athens and Thessaloniki were united to the Church on his suggestion, while retaining the use of the old calendar.

"It would be good if there wasn't this difference in the calendar," he said, "but it's not a matter of faith." To objections that the Pope made the new calendar, he replied, "The Pope made the new calendar, and an idolater made the old one."

A particular case will make the elder's position on the issue of the calendar more clear, the account of an Orthodox Greek, an Old-Calendarist and family man, who lived in America. He and his family had been in America for years, and he had a serious problem, because his wife and children followed the new calendar.

"We weren't able to celebrate any feast together as a family," he related. "It would be Christmas for them and Saint Spyridon's for me: Christmas for me and Saint John's for them. And that was the least of it. The worst thing (just so you know) was that, according to what they taught us, New-Cal-

endarists are heretics and are going to hell. To constantly hear that your wife and children betrayed their faith, joined with the Pope, that their sacraments don't have grace, and so on—is that a minor matter? I would talk with my wife for hours, but we couldn't come to an agreement.

"To tell you the truth, there was something I didn't like about the Old-Calendarists. For example, when some of their bishops would come and speak to us, they didn't speak with love and pain for the deluded (as they thought) New-Calendarists. You'd have thought that they hated them, and that saying they would go to hell made them happy. They were really fanatical. When their homilies would finish, I would feel inner turmoil. I had no thought of leaving our tradition, but I was no longer at peace. I was on the verge of losing my mind. There was no question: I was about to fall apart from all the anxiety I felt.

"On a trip to Greece, I mentioned my predicament to my cousin John. He told me about someone named Elder Paisios, and we decided to go to the Holy Mountain to meet with him.

"We arrived at Panagouda, where the elder, smiling, treated us to something and sat me down next to himself. I was at my wits end. The way he treated me gave me the feeling that he had known me for a long time—as though he knew everything about me.

"The first thing he said was, 'How is it going with the cars over there in America?'

"I was at a loss. I hadn't mentioned that I worked in parking lots and, obviously, dealt with cars.

'It's going well,' was the only thing I could stammer out. I looked at the elder like I was lost.

'How many churches are there where you live?' he continued.

'Four,' I answered, a second wave of surprise coming over me.

'On the old or the new calendar?' And the third thunderbolt hit — which instead of adding to my bewilderment, somehow made me realize the elder's gift. It 'brought me down to earth,' is how I'd put it.

'Two on the old,' I replied, 'and two on the new.'

'Where do you go?' he asked me.

'I go to the Old-Calendarist parish and my wife goes to the New-Calendarist one,' I answered.

"'Look, you should go where your wife is going,' he told me bluntly, and he prepared to list some reasons. But for me, the case was already closed — I didn't need any explanations or arguments. Something unexplainable occurred within me, something divine. A weight was lifted off me and thrown far away. All the arguments, all the threats and the anathemas against the New-Calendarists that I had been hearing for years vanished. I felt the grace of God, which acted upon me through His saint and flooded me with a peace that I had been seeking for years. The way I felt at that moment must have been visible on my face ....

"I remember that this probably caused the elder to stop for a little while. But then he continued, giving a few explanations, possibly for me to relay to others, and possibly for me to remember in times of temptation, when that heavenly state would pass.

"'And, of course,' he said, 'we here on Mount Athos are on the old calendar. But the circumstances are different. We're united with the Church, with all the Patriarchates, with peo-

ple on the new calendar and people on the old calendar. We recognize their mysteries and they recognize ours. Our priests concelebrate. But these poor people have cut themselves off. Most of them are reverent and have exactitude, a spirit of struggle, and zeal for God; it's just that they lack discernment—they have zeal 'not according to knowledge.'[254]

"'Some of them have been led astray out of simplicity, others out of ignorance, and others out of pride. They thought that the thirteen-day difference was a dogmatic issue and that all of us were deluded, so they left the Church. They're not in communion with the Patriarchates and Churches on the new calendar and they're not in communion with the Patriarchates and the Churches that are on the old calendar either, because they say they're tainted because they commune with New-Calendarists. And that's not all: the few Old-Calendarists there are have split into I-don't-know-how-many groups. All they do is split off into smaller groups and anathematize each other and excommunicate each other and depose each other. You don't know how much I've suffered and prayed about this issue. We have to love them and have compassion for them, not condemn them. And even more than that, we have to pray for them, that God will enlighten them. And if it happens one day that someone with good intentions asks us for help, then we should talk to them about it.'"

Over five years had passed since the elder's repose when the man returned to Panagouda to thank the elder, because since their first meeting he had found salvation for his soul and his family. He related his story with tears in his eyes.

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254. Rom. 10:2.

We record here one other discerning stance of the elder's regarding an ecclesiastical matter. Once, an Orthodox clergyman from abroad asked him about a difficulty he had encountered. His bishop put halls under the churches for dancing and other anti-traditional activities. The Christians in his diocese, ill-at-ease, had fled to a schismatic Church. The elder's response was, "If you want to help the people, you shouldn't take what your bishop's doing lightly. That's just the kind of behavior that makes people leave the Church. I'm not saying you should break communion with him and cause a schism, or that you should speak against him publicly. But you shouldn't praise him, either."

With his love, prayer, and discretion, the elder knew when to speak and how to act to quietly help the mother Church, avoiding extremes and healing the wounds that afflict the body of the Church and scandalize the faithful.

On behalf of his People and his Native Land

Having been uprooted in infancy, and having lived through the horror of war and occupation, the elder knew from experience that to "lead a calm and peaceful life" is a great blessing.[255]

He loved his fatherland, and he would say that "a country is like one big family." He didn't wish for national grandeur, glory, or might in the worldly sense, but for peace, spiritual growth, and a good moral life among the Greek citizens, so that God might help them. And he did not desire safety so that people could enjoy comforts.

Encountering an ardent Greek patriot who lived in America and was trying to promote Greece, the elder urged him to struggle to become holy and afterward promote Greece, but in a proper and spiritual way.

The Prophets of Israel actively participated in the life of the nation in their own way—praying, lamenting, reproach-

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255. The quotation is from the anaphora of the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, during which the Church prays that God grant "all civil authorities, and our armed forces ... peaceful times, that we in their tranquility may lead a calm and peaceful life in all reverence and godliness" (*The Liturgikon*, p. 291).—eds.

ing kings, preaching repentance, and prophesying about the approaching evils—and the elder was not indifferent or apathetic about the affairs of his homeland. The prophet who said, "For Zion's sake I will not be silent,"[256] was not a nationalist. The elder's stance was, likewise, purely spiritual.

Although he lived outside of the world, he struggled like few others for the good of his country. His activities and his contribution to national foreign affairs are admirable. He spoke against anti-Greek currents and the falsification of history, and primarily against unjust territorial claims against Greece, such as those made by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, advocates of "pan-Slavism," Albania, Turkey, and others. He used to say, "This one wants Thessaloniki, that one wants everything down to Larisa, and the other one wants the Aegean. My goodness, did Greece ever exist?"

He detected dangers to the nation before they were evident to others. He helped many to see clearly the foreign propaganda being spread to Greece's detriment, and those with positions of influence who cared about such issues took measures accordingly.

With respect to the issue of Macedonia,[257] a top-ranking official relates, "I was right in the middle of it, and I didn't have a clue. The elder opened my eyes. At first, I was puzzled. 'What's he saying? How does he know this stuff?' Later, I understood." The elder had been talking about the issue of

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256. Isa. 62:1

257. "The issue of Macedonia" refers to the claims made by the government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) to parts of Northern Greece, claims it supports by asserting the existence of an ancient Macedonian ethnic identity distinct from that of the Greeks.—eds.

Macedonia since 1977, when he went to Australia. At that time, there were so-called experts who considered such expressions of concern to be "untrustworthy, fanatical scaremongering."

In defense of the Greek character of the region of Macedonia, the elder hung in his guesthouse a passage from Daniel that refers to Alexander as the king of the Greeks.[258] Next to it, he put a large paper icon of an angel from a Serbian monastery, positioned so the angel was pointing to the text.

"In 1992," an Athonite monk recalls, "I visited Elder Paisios with a foreign monk who was living at our monastery. I hurried to introduce him, because it was his first time visiting the elder. We had hardly sat down before the elder began berating the brother. Astounded, I interrupted, saying that the brother had left his homeland and was concerned only with his spiritual development and not with national matters. The elder, with a rather stern air, turned toward me and said, 'Be quiet—you don't know what you're talking about.'"

In fact, as later events bore out, the elder had correctly diagnosed the monk's hypocrisy and foreseen his path. In 1999, he ended up sneaking off without a blessing, after making some secret arrangement, and now he's a big-shot in

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258. The passage was Daniel 8:5–8:27. [The "male goat" mentioned in 8:5, whom Gabriel identifies in 8:21 as "the king of the Greeks" is held by some patristic commentators, such as Saint Jerome, to refer to Alexander the Great. The elder's reference to the Book of Daniel was intended to answer one part of the FYROM argument; specifically their claim, that Alexander the Great was Macedonian but not Greek —eds.]

a schismatic church in his own country.[259]

The elder compared the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to a building built partially with bricks and partially with Farsala halva—eventually it would fall apart on its own.[260]

A man named Nicholas Martis, former Minister for Northern Greece, wrote a book called *The Falsification of Macedonian History* that the elder was quite enthusiastic about. "Glory to God," he commented. "Patriots do exist." He gave away many copies as blessings. He also wrote a short laudatory poem, which the author included in a later edition of the book.

"Turkey will be broken up," the elder said with certainty, "The Kurds will form a country, and the great powers will give us Constantinople. It won't be because they love us—God will arrange things so it'll be in their best interests for us to have it. The spiritual laws will be at work. The Turks will really pay for the things they've done. Their nation will be destroyed, because it didn't start with God's blessing. The writing's on the wall.[261] Before the population exchange,[262] Saint Arsenios said, 'We'll lose our homeland, but then we'll find it again.'"

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259. Among the initiatives of the FYROM government in support of its claims to a distinct Macedonian identity was the creation of an independent "Macedonian Orthodox Church," a body considered schismatic by the wider Orthodox world.—eds.

260. Farsala halva resembles marshmallows and is a popular sweet in Greece.—Trans.

261. Literally, "Their kollyva* is in their sash," an expression implying immanent death.—Trans.

262. See p. 5 ("The Frontier of Farasa").—eds.

The elder recommended that the Bible be translated into Turkish, because he believed that many Turks would be baptized.

Seeing the danger the East posed to the area of Thrace, the elder went to Komotini[263] in order to support Christian converts from Islam, and he wanted to remain with them for a time in order to help them.

But his efforts had repurcussions. One time, a pilgrim[264] found the elder sitting outside his hermitage, very upset. He asked him what happened, and the elder answered, "Unfortunately, my son, we opened the borders, and all sorts of people have come in. A little while ago, while I was on my way back here, I found a young man—big and strong—waiting for me. He grabbed me in a threatening way, and he said, 'Old man, I don't want to see you in Thrace again, and don't get involved with anything happening there. Otherwise...'"—and the man gave Father Paisios a menacing look. The elder continued: "I said to him, 'You scoundrel—what are you talking about? You were a big German boy with education and culture. You went to Mecca, they made you a Muslim, and now you work in Crete for the Turks, pretending to be a shepherd while you spy on army bases[265]. Get out of here.' Before I even finished, he ran off, all red-faced."

When he was asked when Cyprus would become free, he replied, "Cyprus will become free when the Cypriots repent. You have to make spiritual bases in order to get rid of the

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263. Komotini, a city in North-eastern Greece between Alexandroupolis and Xanthi that has a substantial Muslim population.—eds.

264. A now-reposed merchant named Constantine Tselios, from Agrinio.

265. In Crete there is a major American Naval Base.—eds.

bases of the Turks, the British, and the Americans." He considered the situation in Cyprus to be a spiritual matter, not an ethnic or political one, that the solution would come from the repentance and prayer of the people.

He didn't want Christians to be indifferent about matters of their country. He was very sorry to see spiritual people concerned only about getting by as individuals, and not being interested in their country as well. "These days, when Satan is running wild and his people are being organized," he said, "Greeks are mired in apathy. Everyone is concerned only with their own affairs, and nothing else. And whatever you do—no matter how much you shake them—they won't wake up." He was saddened and baffled that those in power did not see where Greece was headed. He foresaw far in advance how the country's problems would develop, and it worried him; but he didn't sow his worries among the people. He spread hope and optimism. "Evil is on top today," he would say, 'but a lot of good's going to come out of it. I see an olive tree. One of its branches has dried up, and the other one is going to dry up, because it's being eaten by a worm. But there's another one, sprouting below, which has a lot of power behind it and it's growing quickly."

The spiritual decline of the citizenry saddened him. "Greece has lost its way," he said. "Sin and debauchery rule the people, but God loves us and is waiting for our repentance." He spoke harshly about people who voted for anti-Christian laws.[266]

The elder regretted that the Greek language had been

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266. One example was the Greek state's legalization of abortion-on-demand in 1986.—eds.

simplified. "The next generation," he once said, "is going to bring in Germans to teach us our own language, and our children will spit on us [for giving it up]." In a letter, he wrote, "The people who got rid of Ancient Greek will bring it back."

He published a short text defending the hero and patriot Makriyiannis[267], a pure and reverent man, from false accusations that had been made against him. He did this, not only to make the truth known, but also because of the urgent need of the nation's politicians for a worthy model, and to help the people to develop sound criteria for their choice of political leaders.

Though a poor hermit, the elder had courage to raise his voice fearlessly before the powerful of his day. For example, there was a certain prime minister whose policies the elder had criticized because of their detrimental effect on the country and the Church. When the man asked to meet with him at Souroti, the elder responded, "Let him come – I'll tell him to his face." Once, when the president of Greece visited Mount Athos, the elder urged the monasteries not to receive him because he had signed a law in support of abortion. And, once, when a government minister wanted to financially

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267. Ioannis Makriyiannis was a truly charismatic and multitalented individual. He was an orphan who became a successful and rich entrepreneur; a soldier in the war of Greek Independence (1821) who became a General; and a writer with only an elementary education whose Memoirs are considered, according to George Seferis, to be a monument of Modern Greek literature. In his Memoirs, he describes facts, feelings, ideas and virtues in a most expressive way. He was a deeply religious man, who made countless prostrations every day and a fervent patriot. As a politician he was instrumental in demanding a constitution from King Otto of Greece who in retaliation sentenced him to death, but under a general uproar, later pardoned him. – eds.

help a monastery that the elder was connected with, the monastery wouldn't accept it, because the man belonged to a party that had passed anti-Christian legislation.

The elder was a man of peace and unity. He didn't belong to any political party—he was above parties. He disapproved of godless political parties and politicians because of their atheism and their polemics against the Church. "If a hand won't make the sign of the Cross," he said, "who cares if it's a left hand or a right hand? What am I going to do with it?" If a politician was godless, the elder didn't care what his positions were. Some parties—knowing his influence with the people—sought to recruit him to solicit votes, but to no avail.

He spoke particularly against Freemasonry.[268] When he was on Sinai, someone from the Greek community in Cairo came to visit him, accompanied by a hieromonk from Sinai. In the middle of their friendly conversation, the man mentioned that he was a Freemason. The normally calm elder suddenly got up and told him indignantly, "Then get lost." He immediately turned his back on the man and left—he wanted to demonstrate with his behavior just how much he abhorred Freemasonry. Another time, a Freemason had begun visiting him, acting as though he were a friend. When the elder found out that he was a Freemason (and had double-checked the fact) he told him of his error and cut off all contact with him.

Political persons would visit him, and he was sent cards

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268. Though many regard Masonry as a simple charitable and fraternal institution, its syncretistic aspects have led to its condemnation by the Church of Greece.—eds.

from members of the Greek parliament, government ministers, American senators, and King Constantine.[269] But he never requested anything for himself or the monasteries he was connected with. He only asked that they act for the good of the nation and the Church.

He helped many government employees, counseling them to be honest and conscientious in their work. He respected reverent, moral members of the armed forces and good educators for the important work that they did. He persuaded many young anarchists to serve in the army. In general, the elder advised people to love and respect their country, to work conscientiously for the common good, and not to be led astray by the typical spirit of indifference, accommodation, excess, and the leveling of everything to the lowest common denominator.

Above all, the elder helped his country inconspicuously, by his prayer, as we have seen from his rule. One can also see this in the poem he wrote to his mother at the time of his tonsure, at the end of which he states that among the reasons he was becoming a monk was to pray "for the entire nation."[270] He set an example in this, and then exhorted others as well. "Let's pray for God to enlighten people in power," he encouraged, "because they can do a lot of good." And when there was tension between Greece and Turkey, he would say, "The sky's full of clouds. Let's chase them away if we can."

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269. The reign of King Constantine, the former king of Greece, began in 1964. He was deposed by Greece's military dictatorship in 1973, and, after the fall of the dictatorship, the monarchy was abolished in 1974 by popular referendum.—eds.

270. See pp 85-86 ("The Small Schema").—eds.

On one such occasion, he had the Divine Liturgy served in his hermitage. At the Beatitudes, he didn't chant what was called for by the typicon; instead, he chanted from the canon of Saint Nicholas of Kataskepinos, appropriate as it was to the circumstances: "Crush the darts of the Godless Hagarenes, O Lady and foil every plot of the demons, sheltering and protecting those who bear Christ's name, so that with loving desire we may glorify Thee."[271]

When the country was going through a period of instability because a government couldn't be formed,[272] the elder was pained and prayed a great deal. Prior to one election, the third held in a short period of time, the following occurred: "It was the eve of the elections," recalled the elder. "I was sitting on the wooden bed in the guest house and saying the Jesus prayer. Suddenly, the devil appeared before my eyes in the form of" – and here the elder named a high-ranking politician of the day, whom he had criticized for certain destructive things he had done – "and he was threatening me. But he couldn't come near me. It was as if he was bound. It was like something had a hold of him and was squeezing him."

That same evening the elder appeared to a married priest in his sleep. He addressed him sternly: "Papa ... why are you sleeping? Get up and pray, because the country's in danger."

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271. *Theotokarion*, Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite, Mode 4 pl., Saturday vespers. [The term "Hagarenes" is used in some Christian literature to refer to Saracens, and Ottomans, and Muslims generally. – eds.]

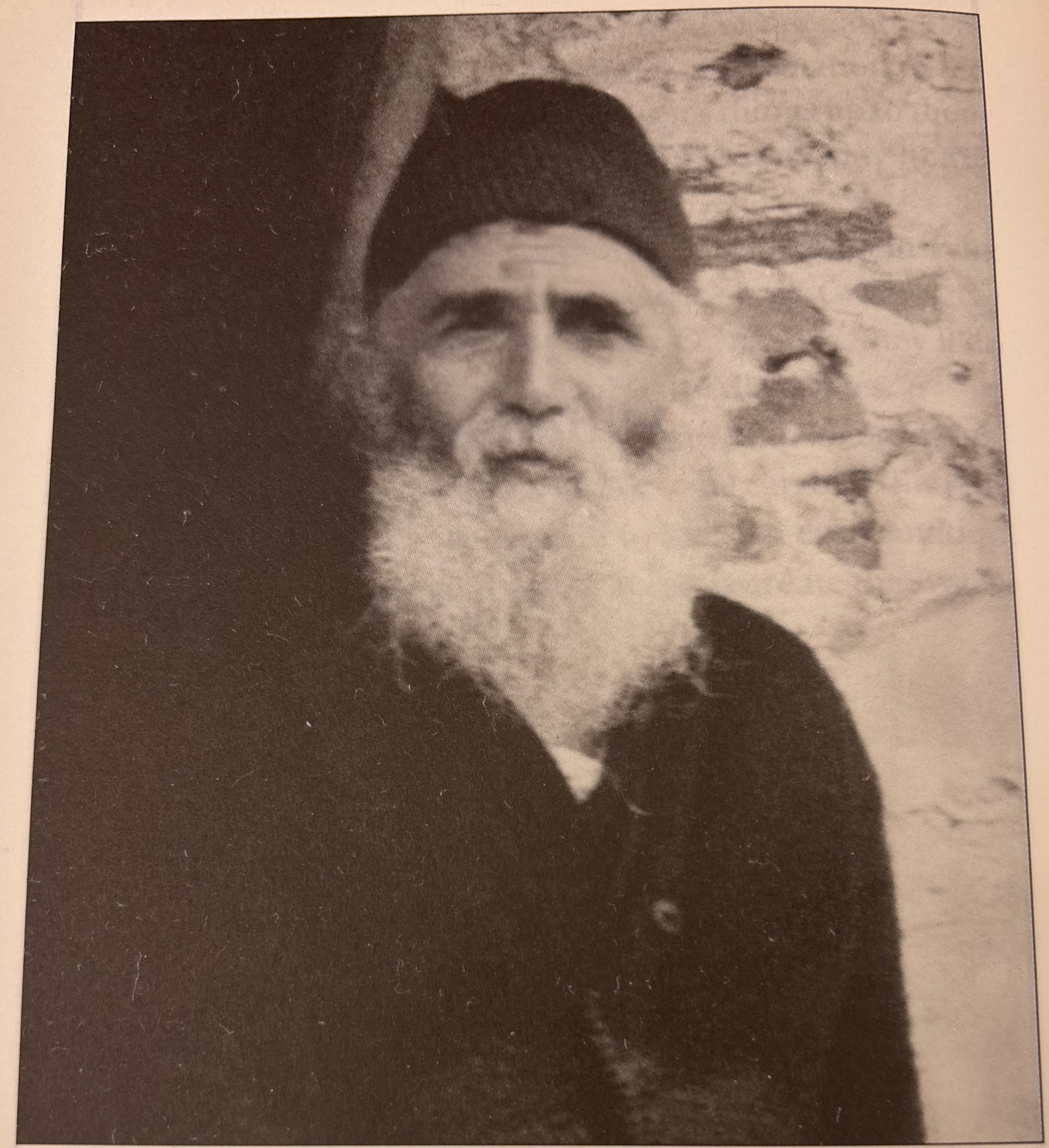
272. That is, an election had been held in which none of the various parties had won a majority, leading to a period of confusion as regards control of the government. – eds.

He waited upon God for the salvation of the nation. He would say, "If God was to leave the fate of the nation to the politicians, we would be ruined. He leaves things up to them just enough so that each of their dispositions may be revealed."

Regarding politicians who committed crimes against the nation, he said, "With a clear conscience, I ask God to give them repentance and then take them. Otherwise, they'll do even worse things, and God will raise up Maccabees."

He believed that a single monastic can help an entire nation. "God makes one person a monk so he can help his family, and another he makes a monk to help an entire nation. The Holy Mountain can offer a lot. It can recreate the Byzantium it came from."

Addendum



Elder Paisios

The Elder's Appearance, Character, and Natural Gifts

The elder's outward appearance was that of an ordinary monk. He stood approximately five feet and three inches. He was very thin, emaciated from many years of asceticism, with handsome, thin, symmetrical facial features. His entire appearance radiated benevolence and compassion.

His glance was vibrant and expressive, piercing and glowing—he spoke and expressed himself with his eyes. His movements were accompanied by peace, assurance, and nobility. His beard was medium-sized, thick, and, by the time of his repose, almost completely white. His hair was black and white and very thick, and it reached to his shoulders. He usually wore a black, knit, woolen monastic cap, which was thick, to protect him from the cold. When traveling outside the Holy Mountain, he wore a standard Athonite one.

The palms of his hands were larger than normal, and firm, and they revealed a man who had performed manual labor. The soles of his feet were big, out of proportion to his height. Almost all of his teeth were missing, except for two of the upper jaw and a few toward the middle of the lower jaw. He didn't want to put in false teeth, despite the suggestions of his spiritual children, but he eventually consented and had two crowns put in. When he laughed, one could see them easily. Despite his missing teeth, he spoke clearly, and it didn't seem like a physical defect. Manifest divine grace cov-

ered this deficiency and gave him an appearance of comely beauty.[273] His face was bright and cheerful. All in all, he was a "shining token of grace."[274]

His senses remained sharp until his repose. With his sense of smell, he could tell if someone was smoking from over a half-mile away. His hearing was very keen. His eyesight was excellent: he could see details from very far away, and, using reading glasses, he made detailed wood carvings until the end of his life.

He looked like an ordinary man, but in "the hidden man of the heart"[275] which was fashioned by God he concealed divine grace—or tried to, though it was impossible to conceal. In his final years, he was like a sweet, ripe fruit, given away by its appearance and aroma.

Though white-haired, elderly, ill, and toothless, the elder was a lion. There was something strong, resolute, and divine about him. That sick and frail body hid a valiant soul, with great strength and incensive power. The holy fathers call this incensive power the vigor of the soul. Turning it towards the good, he used it to attain the virtues. When someone did something wrong that was over the line, he did not hesitate to correct them and, without passion, to become angry—"Be ye angry, and sin not"—without losing his peace, always defending something higher rather than himself.[276] At such

273. See Ps. 44:3 ("Comely art Thou in beauty more than the sons of men; grace hath been poured forth on Thy lips, wherefore God hath blessed Thee for ever").—eds.

274. "Akathist Hymn to the Theotokos," (*A Prayer Book for Orthodox Christians*, p. 221).

275. 1 Pet. 3:4.

276. Eph. 4:26.

times he spoke, not seized by the passion of anger, but with pain of soul.[277]

By nature, he was open and congenial, hospitable and merciful. He loved telling charming stories with spiritual content and laughing from his heart. "Unfortunately," he would say, "most people these days have lost natural laughter." He was able to burst out in tears from sympathy, to embrace a suffering person as a brother on their first meeting, and to sacrifice anything to console and help such a person. He did all this from his heart, naturally and willingly.

He sacrificed himself for his beliefs and out of love for neighbor. He despised double-crossing, malice, and dishonesty. He honored and respected the virtuous, the reverent, those who had ideals and worked for the good of the Church and the nation, and those with eager goodness and a spirit of sacrifice. He would say, "I hold the benevolent, the reverent, and the simple people in my heart."

He humbled himself boundlessly before the most insignificant person, and if they were suffering and sensitive, naturally, he would make any sacrifice for them, humble himself down to the dirt. But against the threats, intimidations, flattery, and bribes of the powerful, he was a towering mountain and an immovable rock. He didn't flinch before threats, dangers, or death. He was impervious to slander and even to the buffetings of "them that war against him on high,"[278] the powerful of the earth.

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277. In the words of Saint John of Damaskus, "The incensive power functions in accordance with nature when it loves all men and does not bear a grievance or harbour malice against anybody" ("On the Virtues and the Vices," *Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 339).

278. Ps. 55:3 (56:2).

He was a man with a rich inner world. He had a heart with purified emotions, unconnected with any sentimentality. He was a perfect man, a man of God, a God-fashioned icon made from the precious materials of the virtues: a "clean and spotless mirror" reflecting the attributes of God. The elder had a good heart, he was raised well, and he was endowed with rare gifts. But he struggled greatly, increasing and doubling his talents as a good and faithful servant.[279] God gave him much, and the elder yielded forth fruit manyfold.

He was a marvel of brilliance, wit, and presence of mind: a rare and unusual case. He had an astounding memory. He would remember for decades someone he had seen once. Once, an elderly man visited him at Panagouda, and the elder asked him, "Are you Kokkinelis?" It was indeed Kokkinelis, with whom the elder had briefly served in the army half a century before.

He was knowledgeable about everything, though without occupying himself with everything. He knew about the things of the world while residing in the desert. Though far from everyone, he was spiritually with all, and he loved the entire world.

He knew many things without having studied. He associated comfortably with scientists and other personages, speaking with them easily and without any feelings of inferiority. On the contrary, the worldly wise consulted him.

When asked if he regretted not having studied, he answered in the negative. The only exception was with regard to Ancient Greek, regarding which he said, "If I had had a

279. See Matt. 25:14–30. – eds.

couple of classes in high school, I would understand the Holy Scriptures and the holy fathers better." Still, he was precise in his words. His replies left no gaps. One understood what he wanted to say without him even having to speak. With few words, he said a great deal. He could, with one descriptive hand gesture, communicate information about a person or an entire situation.

The elder was an artist and poet by nature. He could write poems and troparia, and paint.

He loved work that was done neatly. Whatever he set himself to do, he put his heart into it and did it perfectly: and this was even more the case with everything related to God and the Church. Not everything he touched turned to gold, as in the myth of Midas, but everything he did was imbued with a spiritual quality. He was determined, and he had a way of accomplishing his purposes.

He was simple in his relationships with others, spontaneous and warm, and he had a way of his own, a spiritual art of approaching people in order to communicate with them and comfort them. He followed your words silently, with undivided attention, allowing you to speak and putting himself in your shoes. He dealt with others using sensitivity and prudence: he was strict only with himself. These incongruities in his character created an amazing harmony: leniency toward others and severity toward himself; stillness and sociability; intellectual ability and simplicity of faith; and reverent observance of ecclesiastical and spiritual rules combined with a spirit of freedom.

The elder stood out in all his endeavors: he was by nature a spacious vessel, a powerful machine, and a high-powered spotlight. But he preferred to be, as he put it, a "tin

can," reflecting the rays of the Sun of Righteousness—pointing to the Sun instead of temporarily illumining this false world through self-promotion. He struggled greatly, in eager goodness and self-denial. He gave everything to God, and he withstood temptations and afflictions for God's sake. He helped a numberless multitude of people. He contested with the devil and emerged the victor, and now he hears the blessed voice: "... to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."[280]

280. Rev. 2:7.

His Message

Instead of an epilogue, we set forth here some of the characteristic points of the elder's teaching:

First we believe in God, and later we love God and His image, mankind. Faith increases with prayer. "Increase our faith."[281]

I've come to see that all evil comes from disbelief. When man doesn't believe in God, he wants to revel away his life, so he gives himself over to every kind of sin.

Man must grasp the deeper meaning of life: that this life is for us to get ready for the next one. At this point, just like a traveler needs a guide to reach his destination, one must find a guide, [a spiritual father] for the heavenly journey, Then, the guide will give him a program: a little reading and a little prayer, so the person will avoid occasions to sin and the worldly mindset, which is the worst thing of all. And, in this way, his heart will be in Christ.

We must struggle with eager goodness to save ourselves so we won't sadden Christ. Christ will say to us, 'My child, I did so many things to save you. I poured out my blood and endured so much suffering. And you—what did you do for your salvation?

Each person must find and sanctify their calling. Everyone who's diligent will be successful, wherever they may be, whether they're married or monks.

We should prefer afflictions and see them as better than pleas-

ures. A lot of times bitter medicines are better than sweet ones, be-

---

281. Luke 17:5.

cause they heal. Suffering gives birth to true joy.

What hinders spiritual progress is that people focus on other things instead of what benefits them spiritually.

For us to pray in our hearts, pain for the state of the world today has to enter into us.

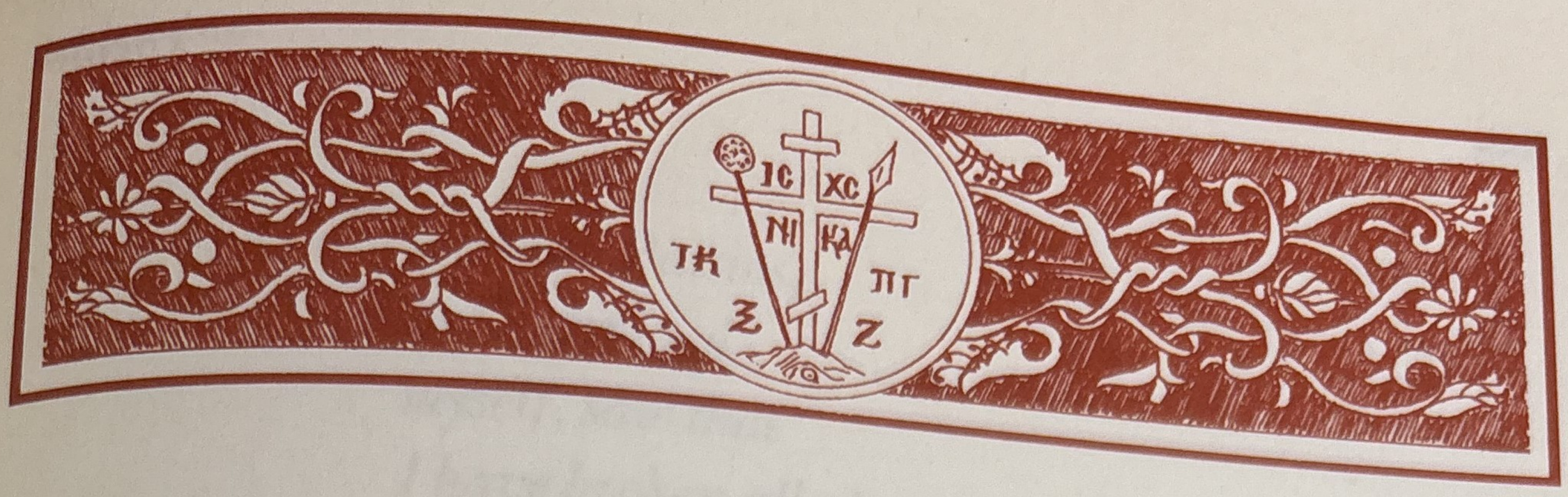
Today the time has come for the sheep to be separated from the goats, the faithful from the faithless. Later we'll be tested and persecuted for our faith, and then you'll be able to tell the copper from the gold.

When someone grieves from suffering for others, feeling their pain, making their problems his own, then he has a martyr's reward. How full of grace are people who sacrifice everything! They don't have any problems, and their face shines because they have divine joy all the time.

The entire foundation of the spiritual life is for people to think of others and put themselves last, not to think of themselves. When we put ourselves in another person's shoes and understand them, then we're Christ's kin.

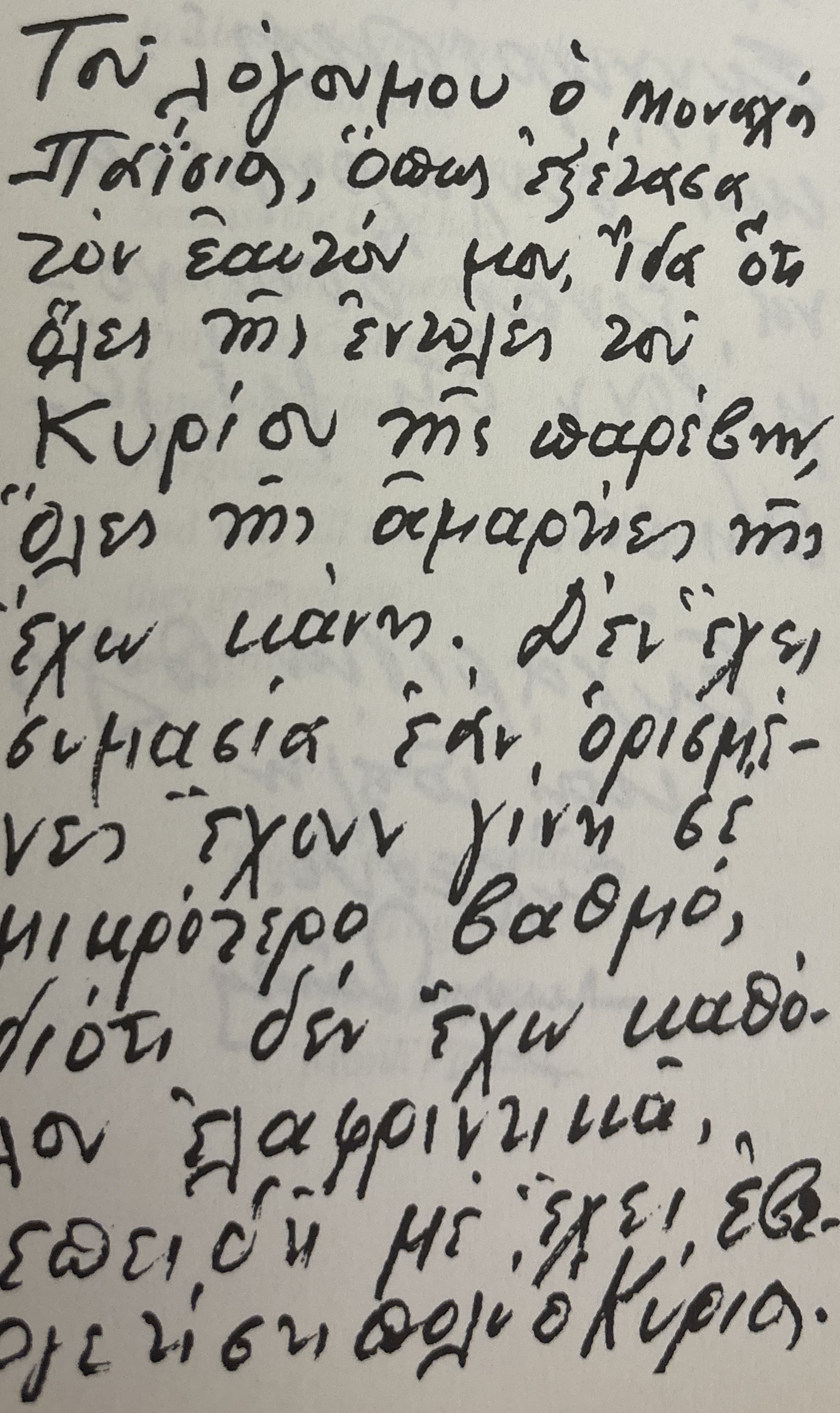
The grace of God is a valuable thing. It won't come and dwell within someone unless it finds that person in agreement with God according to the Spirit and he exhausts every human effort. What we want, though, is for divine grace to come and free us from our weaknesses without a struggle. In order for the Holy Spirit to dwell in man, it takes a lot of self-denial, a lot of eager goodness, humility, nobility, and sacrifice. The aim of the spiritual life is not pleasure. Christ has put the outlet in, but our cords have gotten rusty, so they can't receive divine grace. To clean the cords, we have to struggle to know ourselves, to cut off our passions, and to acquire the virtues, and then God's grace will visit us.

To Him be the glory and the dominion unto the ages. Amen.



The Elder's Spiritual Will

This text, written in the elder's own hand, was found at Panagouda after his repose:



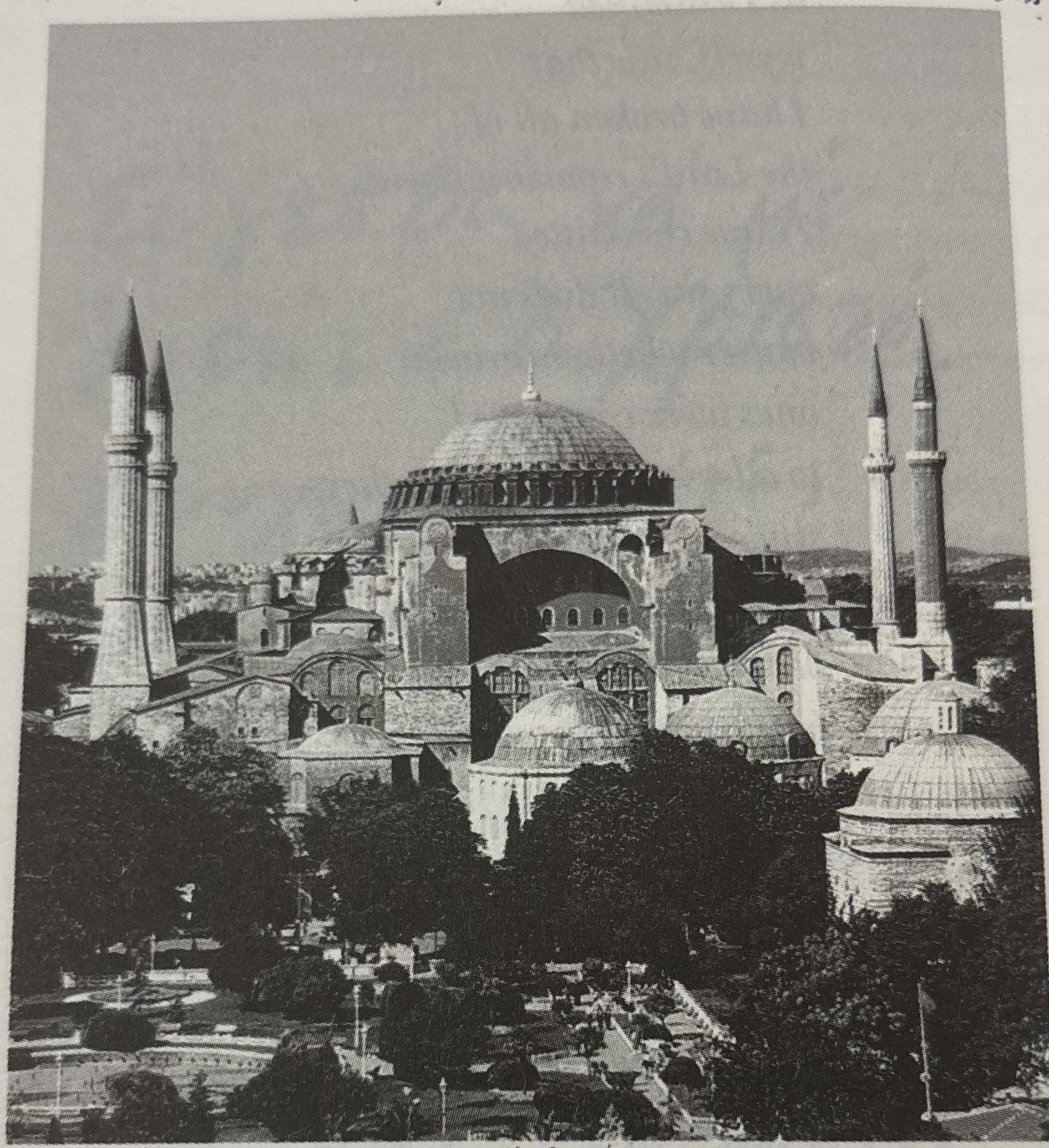
Τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ μου ὁ Μοναχὸς
Παΐσιος, ὅπως ἐξέλεξα
τὸν ἑαυτόν μου, ἵνα ὅτι
θέλει τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ
Κυρίου τῆς χαρίσεως,
θέλει τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τῆς
ἔχω μαζί. Δὲν ἔχει
δυναμία ἐάν, ὁριζόμε-
νος ἔχουν γίνει εἰς
μικρότερο βαθμό,
διότι δὲν ἔχω μαθό-
τον ἐλεφρότητα,
ἐφόσον μὲ ἔχει ἐξε-
λέξει ὁ Κύριος.

Εὔχεσθε νὰ μὲ
ἐλεήσῃ ὁ Χριστός.
Συνχωρέσετε,
καὶ συνχωρημένοι
νὰ εἶναι ὅσοι νο-
μίζουν ὅτι μὲ ἀδι-
κοῦν.

Εὐχαριστῶ πολύ,
καὶ πολὺ
εὐχέομαι.
Ὁ Θεός
[illegible]

I, Monk Paisios,
as I examined
myself, saw that
I have broken all of
the Lord's commandments,
I have committed
every sin. It does not
matter whether certain
ones were committed
to a lesser degree than others,
since I do not have
any excuse at all for any of them,
because the Lord has
been greatly generous to me.
Pray that God may
have mercy on me.
Forgive me,
and may all those who think that
they grieved me
be forgiven.

Thank you very much,
and again,
pray for me.
Monk Paisios



Hagia Sofia (The Church of the Holy Wisdom, Christ) in Constantinople, the symbol of Romanity. A post card with a hand written inscription by Elder Paisios, addressed to "beloved brother John", a disciple who later became a monk.

APPENDIX

A. Works by Elder Paisios

In Greek

1. *Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἀρσένιος ὁ Καππαδόκης*, 1975, 2005.
2. *Ὁ Γέρων Χατζή-Γεώργης ὁ Ἀθωνίτης*, 1986, 2005.
3. *Ἁγιορεῖτες Πατέρες καί Ἁγιορείτικα*, 1993, 2005.
4. *Ἐπιστολές*, 1994, 2005.

Translated into English

1. *Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian*, 1989, 2001.
2. *Elder Hadji-Georgis the Athonite*, 1996, 2002.
3. *Athonite Fathers and Athonite Matters*, 1999, 2002.
4. *Epistles*, 2002, 2002.

B. Series: Spiritual counsels by Elder Paisios of Mount Athos.

In Greek

1. *Λόγοι Α΄- Μέ πόνο καί ἀγάπη γιά τόν σύγχρονο ἄνθρωπο*, 1998, 2006.
2. *Λόγοι Β΄- Πνευματική ἀφύπνιση*, 1999, 2006.
3. *Λόγοι Γ΄- Πνευματικός ἀγώνας*, 2001, 2005.
4. *Λόγοι Δ΄- Οἰκογενειακή ζωή*, 2002, 2006.
5. *Λόγοι Ε΄- Πάθη καί ἀρετές*, 2006.

Translated into English

1. *Volume I With Pain and Love for the Contemporary Man.*
2. *Volume II Spiritual Awakening*, 2008.
3. *Volume III Spiritual Struggle.*

All the works are published by the Holy Monastery of "Evangelist John the Theologian" Souroti, Thessaloniki, Greece.

GLOSSARY

abbot's council. An assembly of elders which meets regularly or as needed and which serves as an advisory council to the abbot of a monastery or to the dikaios of a skete. In a monastery the council members are elected, whereas in a skete they are the elders of every Kalyve.

akathist. An akathist hymn *Akathistos* in Greek and *Akafist* in Russian), literally meaning 'not sitting', is a liturgical text in honour of a specific saint, feast, event, or need. Although akathist hymns may have Christ or various saints as their subjects, but the most famous akathist is dedicated to the Mother of God, which was traditionally composed by Saint Romanos the Melodist in AD 532. In terms of poetic structure, akathists consist of alternating short stanzas (*kontakia*) and long stanzas (*ikoi*) including repeated refrains of exultation.

antidoron (Gk. "instead of the gift"). A small piece of the altar bread (prosphoron) distributed after the celebration of the Eucharist to each of those faithful who did not partake of the Holy Mysteries. It is the pious custom of some faithful to retain a portion of the antidoron given them on Sunday for consumption every morning of the week, along with Holy Water, before they have eaten anything else.

Athonite School. This ecclesiastical academy established near Vatopedi monastery in the middle of the eighteenth century with the aim of educating monks and monastic

seekers through a curriculum including theology, philosophy, mathematics, physics, geometry, and Latin. Saint Cosmas of Aitolia, Equal to the Apostles (commemorated on August 24) was among the school's notable graduates. It closed by the century's end, but its successor, formally called the "Athonite Ecclesiastical Academy," began in the twentieth century to educate secondary-school students in a new location on the Holy Mountain, a wing of Saint Andrew's Skete in Karyes.

athonite. (1) (n) A monk of Mount Athos (e.g. 'He is an athonite'; or in commemorations, 'St Athanasius the Athonite'). (2) (adj) A practice or custom originating in or common to the Holy Mountain. In particular this may refer to specific liturgical or ascetical practices, or to monastic typika and customs. 3) Colloquially, often taken to refer to something characterised by an intense and driving asceticism (e.g. 'His fasting was almost athonite').

Burazeri. A large kelli with the appearance of a monastery, close to Karyes. It is dedicated to St. Nicholas and was built by Russian monks before the Russian Revolution in 1917.

byzantine time or Athos time. Refers to the method of calculating time on Mount Athos. The clocks are adjusted daily at sunset, which is considered 12 o'clock midnight.

canon. (n) (1) From the Greek for 'measuring stick' or 'rule', refers in the earliest Christian writings to a 'rule of faith' (*kanon pisteos*), or summary confession of the central tenets of Christian life and thought; (2) an ecclesiastical rule (sometimes 'law') established by a Church council; (3) as 'canon law', in reference to the collected body of Church canons used to guide the life of the Christian community in

its ascetical aims; (4) often in reference to the collection of canons known as The Rudder; (5) the fixed list of scriptural books deemed authoritative by the Church (i.e. 'the scriptural canon'). In the Orthodox Church, these books include: (a) *The Old Testament:* Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Kingdoms (1 Samuel), 2 Kingdoms (2 Samuel), 3 Kingdoms (1 Kings), 4 Kingdoms (2 Kings), 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, 1 Esdras, Ezra (2 Esdras), Nehemiah (2 Esdras), Tobit, Judith, Esther, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, 3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees, Job, Psalms, Odes, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Wisdom, Sirach, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi; (b) *The New Testament:* Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Apocalypse; (6) liturgical texts or a particular part of the Liturgy: (a) the theological hymn in nine odes (canticles) sung after the reading of the Gospel at Matins; (b) any similarly-structure hymn, as said at various times (e.g. the Canon of Repentance, Canon to the Holy Angels); often found as acrostics; (c) at times used in reference to the anaphora or central prayers of the Divine Liturgy, beginning with 'Mercy of peace...'; (6) an established principle (e.g. 'the canons of polite society'); (7) basis for judgment; a standard or criterion; (8) a group of literary works that are generally accepted as representing a field (e.g. 'the canon of ascetical literature'), or

the output of a specific author ('the Pauline canon').

cassock (Gk. Raso; Sl. ryassa). The long black garment with large sleeves worn by the Orthodox clergy as their distinct attire. Another such cassock with narrow sleeves (Gk. Anteri or Zostikon; Sl. Podrasnik) is worn under the cassock. It symbolizes the death of a clergyman to this world, his burial, and subsequent dedication to God and his heavenly kingdom.

coenobitic. Monastic life in a monastery or hermitage where monks live a life in common under an abbot.

Corfu (Kerkyra). The northernmost of the seven islands in the Ionian Sea of Western Greece. St. Arsenios reposed and was buried in the capital of the island, also named Corfu (or Kerkyra).

Crete. An island of the Aegean Sea in southeastern Greece.

Daphne. The main port of Mount Athos located on the western side of the peninsula. This small village is made up of a few supply stores, the customs house, police station, coast guard quarters, and postal office. A bus line connects Daphne to Karyes, the administrative capital of the Holy Mountain. The road was constructed in 1963 for the celebration of the millennium of the Athonite monastic community.

dikaios. The monk responsible for the care of the skete's main church and the management of the common matters of the community. In idiorythmic sketes he is elected every May. In coenobitic sketes he is the abbot.

diptychs (Gk. "folding boards"). (1) Lists of names for the living and the departed, compiled for regular commemoration at the Divine Liturgy; (2) an official roster of

the names of the heads of Orthodox jurisdictions read during the liturgy by concelebrating bishops, or the head of an ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

ecclesiasticos. The monk responsible for assisting in church during the services. This is one of the obediences that a monk might receive.

economia. see oikonomia

elder or geronda. A *geronda* (pronounced "yeh-ron-da") is a hieromonk, priest, or monk who, ideally, has reached dispassion by the grace of God. Thus, enlightened by his holiness and long experience in the spiritual life, he has the gift of guiding the souls of his spiritual children to dispassion. In a broader sense, though, it is used as a respectful title for any spiritual father or any elderly hieromonk, priest, or monk.

epitrachelion. (n) The distinctive liturgical garment of the priest: a long stole wrapped around the neck and descending down over the chest to the ground, with its two sides sewn together. It symbolizes 'the beard of Aaron'.

Esphigmenou. One of the twenty main monasteries on Mount Athos today, it is located on the far northeastern side of the peninsula. The brotherhood at that time ceased commemoration of the Patriarch of Constantinople in the late 1960s due to his statements regarding, and relations with, the heterodox. At a later date, it also attached itself to the Old Calendarists movement, active in Greece since the 1920s, and ceased to be in communion with the other monasteries on the Holy Mountain, as well as the local Orthodox Churches. As a consequence, it also does not take any part in the administrative procedures required by the constitution of Mount Athos.

garden of the Mother of God. One of the names for the Holy Mountain. This name stems from a tradition that the All Holy Theotokos and the Holy Evangelist and Apostle John stopped here on their way to Ephesus. The Theotokos was moved by the beauty of the place and asked Christ to reserve this place as her own special garden.

Gerontikon. A collection of anonymus writers containing sayings and acts of winsdom of the first desert dwellers.

Great Lavra. The first-ranking monastery of the twenty on the Holy Mountain, it was established by St. Athanasius the Athonite in 963 A.D. It is located on the southeastern side of the peninsula.

Great Lent. The seven week period leading up to Pascha (Easter Sunday), during which Orthodox Christians fast from meat, dairy products, wine and oil. Wine and oil are permitted only on Saturdays and Sundays, but on the Feast of the Annunciation fish is also allowed.

great schema or angelic schema. The great schema (or "great habit") is the final stage of monasticism, named for the large piece of decorated fabric worn by monks who have entered this stage. Although in some communities, as in ancient times, it is the only stage of monasticism after the novitiate; in more recent monasticism one or more other stages are interposed. A monk of the great schema (or a "great-schema monk") is given a demanding rule of prayer and ascetical life. See also the footnote 129 page 163.

Gregoriou. The seventeenth-ranking monastery of the twenty on the Holy Mountain. It is located on the peninsula's west side.

Holy Mountain or Mount Athos. A peak, about 6,670 ft high, in northeast Greece. It is the site of the semi-inde-

pendent monastic state of Mount Athos (known also as Haghion Oros, 'The Holy Mountain'), originally founded in the tenth century though settled far earlier. Athos is often understood as the heart of Orthodox monasticism and remains to this day a significant locus of monastic practice in the Orthodox world.

hagiorite. A resident of the Holy Mountain (*Haghion Oros*); a synonym of athonite.

hermitage. For the sake of simplicity, this term is used in this book to refer to three different types of dwellings on the Holy Mountain: a Kelli*, a Kalyve* and a Kathisma*.

hesychasterion. 1) Outside of Mount Athos this refers to a coenobitic monastery that is dependent on the local bishop only for spiritual matters. 2) On Mount Athos this term denotes a hermitage in which an ascetic lives a way of life that is more strict than the monastery upon which he is dependent.

Hilandar Monastery. This is the fourth-ranking monastery in the hierarchy of twenty monasteries on Mount Athos. Hilandar was founded in 1198 by Ss. Sava and Symeon of Serbia. It is the northernmost of the monasteries on the peninsula.

hours. In Orthodox monasteries, monks maintain special services for the main hours of the day. Each hour commemorates a special event, as follows: a) first hour (6:00 a.m.) – thanksgiving for the new morning and prayer for a sinless day; b) third hour (9:00 a.m.) – the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost; c) sixth hour (12:00 noon): the nailing of Christ to the Cross; d) ninth hour (3:00 p.m.) – the death of Christ.

idiorythmic monastery. A monastery where monks live

according to their own rule of life. In the idiorythmic monasteries on Athos only the divine services were held in common with no abbot, common Elder or common meal, nor even mandatory non-possessiveness. The fathers met their needs by receiving a material blessing (mainly money and food) in exchange for their service to the monastery. Today all the monasteries of the Holy Mountain are coenobitic.

Ioannina. A city in northwestern Greece, and the capital of the Epirus region. The Greek-Albanian border is located thirty-five miles to the north, and Konitsa is located fifty-six miles to the northeast.

Iveron Monastery. The third ranking monastery on Mount Athos. It was founded in 980 by Georgian monks, on the east coast of the Holy Mountain. It houses the miraculous icon of the Panagia Portaitissa (the Gatekeeper), one of the most well-known and venerated icons on Mount Athos.

kalyve, pl. kalyvia (lit. hut). Usually a small monastic dwelling with or without a church, which includes a small piece of property. It is normally part of a skete.

Kapsala. Located within fifteen minutes by foot to the north of Karyes with many kellia. In 1920 it was an informally considered skete with 53 inhabited kellia, but today only about half are occupied.

Karoulia. Located on the southwest tip of the Athonite peninsula, this is one of the most ascetic areas in the so called desert of Athos because there is no water nearby. The hermitages were built primarily by Russian monks before the 1917 Revolution on the almost vertical crags rising above the sea. The hermitages employed ropes and pulleys

(*karoulia* in Gk.) to lower baskets to the boats in the sea below, in order to exchange their handiwork with needed supplies. Communication between the hermitages was made using narrow steps and chain links affixed to the rock.

Karyes. The capital and the administrative center of Mount Athos for the last eleven centuries. It functions like a skete and is administered by the Protos. The main church of Karyes is the Protaton dedicated to the Assumption of the Holy Theotokos. The miraculous icon of the Mother of God Axion Estin ("It is truly meet"), the most venerated icon of the Holy Theotokos on Mount Athos, is treasured here.

kathisma, pl. kathismata. (1)The twenty stanzas into which the Orthodox Psalter is divided; (2) A liturgical hymn: the second canon of Matins; (3) A very small monastic dwelling in the vicinity of and dependant on a monastery, where a monk lives a very strict life.

Katounakia. An area on the southwestern edge of the peninsula, located above Karoulia. There are twenty two inhabited hermitages in the region today.

Kavsokalyvia (lit. burnt huts). This Skete received its name from one of its inhabitants' (St. Maximos Kavsokalyves) peculiar practice of burning down the hut he was living in upon his departure. The Skete is located on the southernmost tip of the peninsula.

kelli, pl. kellia. (1) A monastic dwelling larger than a kalyve and usually inhabited by three or four monks who live under the guidance of an elder. A kelli usually has a small chapel and a sizable storage space for foodstuffs. It is always dependent on a monastery and never on a skete.

Sometimes its size increases and it functions as a coenobitic monastery but is still called a kelli; (2) the room (lit. cell) of a monk; his living quarters.

Kerasia. An informal skete located on the southwestern tip of the peninsula.

kollyva. This mixture of boiled wheat, sugar, and dried nuts is offered and blessed in church in commemoration of the reposed or of a Saint and symbolizes the hope of the resurrection and the sweet life of Paradise.

Konstamonitou. The last of the twenty monasteries and the poorest one, is on the north-west side of the Athos peninsula.

Koutloumousiou. The sixth ranking monastery on Mount Athos. Karyes is within walking distance of the monastery. Panagouda, or little Panagia, the kelli which the Elder Paisios inhabited, belongs to this monastery.

Kyriakon. The common, central church of a skete where the monks attend Divine Services on Sundays and feast days.

Lakkou Skete. A skete inhabited by Romanian monks. The Kyriakon is dedicated to Saint Demetrius.

Lausaic history. A book written by Palladius to Lausus, recording the life and teachings of the desert fathers. It is also recording for the first time, the life and the asceticiscm of women who lived in the desert or in the world.

menaion. A liturgical book containing the lives of the saints and the special liturgical hymns (stichera) for the feast-days of the Orthodox Saints. It is divided into twelve volumes, one for each month.

Meteora. A group of monasteries located on the summits of vertical rock formations in Thessaly, Greece. The

name is derived from the Greek word meaning "suspended in the air."

metochion. A small monastic dependency, any type of hermitage or a piece of property that belongs to a monastery, but is located at a considerable distance from the monastery or outside of Mount Athos.

midnight office (or nocturns). The first service of the morning cycle of prayers, which is appointed to be said in the midst of the night in remembrance of our Lord's midnight prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. The primary theme of the midnight office is death and judgment, and thus it serves to remind us that we must always be ready to make our defense before the dead judgment seat of Christ, Who will come suddenly, just like the bridegroom who comes in the midst of the night in the Gospel parable (Matt. 25:1-13). It also reminds us of the angels who praise God night and day.

Mount Athos. See Holy Mountain.

mystery or sacrament. Sacred ecclesiastical rites by which the grace of the Holy Spirit is imparted to the faithful. The mysteries of the Church include: Holy Baptism, Chrismation, the Holy Eucharist (or Holy Communion), Repentance and Confession, the Holy Priesthood or Ordination, Holy Marriage, and Holy Unction (or anointing of the sick).

New Skete. A skete to the north of St. Anne's skete with 26 kalyvia and dependent on St. Paul's Monastery.

obedience. Monastic service or work carried out by a monk in a monastery or a hermitage, such as the work of a gardener, cook, librarian, secretary, etc. An obedience is assigned by the abbot and usually lasts one year.

oikonomia. (1) The wise or responsible management, "stewardship," or administration of something, sometimes synonymous with providence; (2) that component of doctrine dealing with the divine plan of salvation or Incarnation history (Eph 1:9-10), in contrast with the study of the Trinity, which is theology proper. The theological concept of *oikonomia* was based on the idea of a relationship between a righteous God and sinful man that required God's dispensation of grace and mercy culminating in the "economic" sacrifice of the Son. God's *oikonomia* operates chiefly through the mysteries; (3) moral concession as opposed to the rule or order or taxis. The prudent disposition of church stewardship, which aims at the general well-being of the Church and each individual. In canonical literature *oikonomia* is understood as the canonical power of the church by which, under certain circumstances, the strict letter of ecclesiastical law was relaxed. Its purpose is to avoid the severity of the law, to eliminate an obstacle to salvation caused by a rigid legalistic implementation. According to Nicholas I Mystikos, *oikonomia* is ultimately the imitation of the divine mercy (ep. 32, 236.379-80).

old calendarists: All Orthodox Churches follow the old (or Julian) calendar in order to determine the date of Pascha and the other associated paschal feasts. This calendar is also used for all other celebrations in the Church by the Patriarchates of Russia, Jerusalem, Georgia, Serbia and the monastic republic of Mount Athos. In 1924 the Patriarchate of Constantinople (or Ecumenical Patriarchate) adopted the new (or Gregorian) calendar in order to calculate the date for the celebration of all feasts except for Pascha and the entire Paschal cycle. Over the next forty

years the churches of Alexandria, Antioch, Romania, Greece, Cyprus, and Bulgaria followed suit. The adoption of the new calendar by the Ecumenical Patriarchate without pan-Orthodox agreement and under the cloud of extra-ecclesial influence was the occasion for the creation of the so-called Old Calendarist Schism. Although Mount Athos is under the spiritual jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, all the monks remained on the old or Julian calendar. A portion of the monks on Athos, including those in the monastery of Esphigmenou and many kellia, later severed communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and all local Orthodox Churches primarily on account of this irregular change, choosing instead to follow bishops of the newly-created old-calendarist groups. See pp. 661-664 for further analysis and an example.

orarion (n.). The distinctive liturgical vestment of the deacon; a length of decorated, broad fabric hung off the left shoulder worn over the sticharion, similar to the priest's epitrachelion, but not worn around the neck.

Ouranoupolis. This small fishing village has grown into a major tourist centre with many hotels serving travelers exploring Mount Athos. Located on the western side of the peninsula, it is the main port for boats departing for the Holy Mountain.

Panagia. The Greek word *Panagia* is a term of great endearment used by the faithful in Greece to refer to the Virgin Mary. It literally means "the All-Holy One." The Greek word has been retained in translation as revealing something of the elder's relationship with the Mother of God. The "a's" are pronounced as in father, while the "g" represents a sound that does not exist in English, somewhere

between a hard "g" (as in get) and a "y" (as in yes).

pappoulis. A diminutive of grandpa, a term of endearment for a priest or a monk. It is equivalent to the Russian *Batushka*. Since there is an explicit affection respect and love in the word pappoulis, it has been retained in translation.

Parakletike or Octoechos (or Book of the Eight Tones). This book contains the variable parts of the daily services chanted throughout the week. Eight series of services, one for each of the eight tones, are provided, within which are seven sets of services, one for each day of the week. The First Tone begins on St. Thomas Sunday (the Sunday after Pascha) and proceeds in sequence each week until Tone Eight is completed, at which time the whole cycle is repeated.

Pascha. The Feast of Feasts, Pascha (lit. Passover, from the Hebrew, Peshah) is the celebration of the Lord's Resurrection, known in the West as "Easter." During the Last Supper Christ and His disciples were celebrating the passage of the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land. In the New Covenant the type was fulfilled and the spiritual meaning was revealed: the passover from the slavery of sin to eternal life and from earth to Heaven that came with the Sacrificial Crucifixion and the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Philotheou. This monastery is ranked fourteenth in the hierarchy of twenty Athonite monasteries. In 1973 was converted from an idiorythmic to coenobitic by the brotherhood of Elder Ephraim, the first abbot of the coenobitic monastery. Elder Ephraim, later departed for the United States, to found eighteen monasteries. The Monastery of Saint Anthony the Great, located outside Phoenix, Arizona,

where the Elder resides, is the largest.

Portaitissa (lit. the Gatekeeper). The miraculous icon of the Mother of God which appeared floating in the sea off the shore of Iveron Monastery, immersed in a pillar of light. Placed inside the monastery catholicon (church) beside the altar, on the following day the icon was found by the gate, where eventually a church was built. Together with the icon of Axion estin in Karyes, this icon is the most venerated icon of the Panagia on Mount Athos.

prayer rope (Gk. *komboskini*, Rus. *tchotki*). A cord, usually made from wool, with many knots (varying from 33, 50, 100 to 300), each knot containing nine smaller knots symbolizing the nine angelical orders. The prayer rope is used in prayer to help the intellect concentrate. At each knot one prayer, which is usually the Prayer of Jesus (Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me), is said. The prayer rope is given to a monastic during his tonsure as his weapon against his enemy, the devil.

Prophet Elias' Skete. A coenobitic skete built on the scale of an Athonite monastery by Russians monks before the Bolshevik revolution.

proskomide (Gk. "gathering of gifts" or "preparing to receive the gifts"; Sl. Shertvennik). The Service of the preparation of the elements of bread and wine before the Liturgy. It takes place on the table of oblation (prothesis), which is situated at the left (north) side of the altar. During the proskomide, Orthodox Christians living and reposed are commemorated by name. The names to be commemorated are recorded in the diptychs, so-called because the list doubles over, the names of the living on one side and those of the reposed on the other.

prosphoron, pl. prosphor-a. (Gk. "offering gift, an item dedicated to God and offered as a votive," also prosphora). The altar bread which is leavened and prepared with pure wheat flour to be used for the Eucharist. It is round and stamped on the top with a special seal (sphragis or Panagiarion). Sometimes it is made in two layers symbolizing the two natures of Christ (Human and Divine). The inscribed parts of the top are used for the Eucharist, and the rest of it is cut into small pieces to be distributed to the faithful (antidoron).

raso. See cassock.

rasophore-rasoefhi. The term *rasophore* refers to an intermediary stage of monastic life after the novitiate. In becoming a rasophore, the aspirant does not make the promises he will if he becomes a Schema-monk. Rather, he is tonsured, he is given a new name, and a prayer is read over him (*rasoefhi*) when he receives his monastic cassock (in Greek, *raso*), an over-garment having wide sleeves and reaching to the ankles.

Rudder (Gk. Pedalion). The Rudder is a book written by Saint Nicodemos of Mount Athos, addressed to the clergy, containing the rules and regulations prescribed by the Oecumenical Councils and the Church Fathers.

semantron. A wooden plank hanging in a fixed position, which is rhythmically hit with a wooden hammer to announce the beginning of the Divine Services. This practice harkens back to Noah who, after the construction of the ark had been completed, invited the animals to enter by striking the last plank of the ark rhythmically. See also talanton.

six psalms. Psalms 3, 37, 62, 87, 102 and 142 which are

A monk hitting the semantron with a wooden hammer.

read at the beginning of Matins. There is a tradition that says that the time it takes to recite these psalms, is the same amount needed for the final Judgment at the Second Coming of Christ.

skete. A small monastic village, dependent on a monastery, usually consisting of a central church (Kyriakon) and several cells or kellia (monastic houses each with its own brotherhood and usually with its own chapel). The way of life at a skete is a mixture of idiorythmic and coenobitic styles of monasticism, which, however, is usually stricter and more ascetic than life in a monastery. A Dikaios administers the common property and is responsible for the Kyriakon and for providing hospitality for visitors.

small schema or mandya. It is the second stage or rank of monastic life, following the rasoefhi and preceding the

great schema. In taking the small schema, the monk receives the small schema itself (usually a small piece of decorated fabric), a cross and a prayer rope, is tonsured, receives a new name and a mandya (a cape). In some traditions, prior to this point, a monk may choose to return to the world; however, a monastic who has taken the schema is universally considered to be irrevocably committed to monastic life.

Souroti. A suburb of Thessaloniki, where the Monastery of St. John the Evangelist is located. It is in this monastery, where Elder Paisios reposed and was buried. Today, in Greece, Souroti has become synonymous with the monastery.

St Andrew's Skete. A coenobitic skete built as an oversized monastery. It was expanded at the beginning of the 20th century by Russians and at its peak time eight hundred monks lived here.

St Anne's Skete. Located on the west side of the Holy Mountain, it is between 902 and 1,476 ft above sea level. One thousand five-hundred and fifty stairs separate the dock from the Kyriakon of the skete. It is the oldest and the largest skete on Athos, with 53 kalyvia and is a dependant of the Great Lavra Monastery. The Kyriakon of the skete is dedicated to St. Anne and it treasures the precious relics of St. Anne's left foot.

Stavronikita Monastery. The fifteenth ranking monastery on Athos, it is located on the east shore of the peninsula. This Monastery was converted from the idiorythmic to the coenobitic way of life in 1968 by the small brotherhood formed around Elder Paisios at the hermitage of the Archangels in the Skete of Iveron.

Stichari[on]. (Sl. Podriznik, Lat. Alb). The long white robe of the clergy, with narrow sleeves, worn by the priests under the phelonion or by the bishops under the sakkos.

stillness (Gk. *hesychia*). The stillness sought is not outer peace and quiet, but an inward condition, an internal stillness of the intellect (nous). However, the former plays an important role in the acquisition of the latter. As Elder Paisios writes, for the beginner, "[external] stillness, along with asceticism and unceasing prayer, brings inner stillness to the soul, and very quickly." Internal stillness is the ascetical practice of noetic stillness linked with watchfulness and deepened by the unceasing prayer of Jesus.

talanton. It is a simple, hand-held wooden instrument that is struck with a wooden hammer several times to mark the start of each monastic service. It was used widely before the introduction of bells. See also semantron.

theotokarion. A canon dedicated to the All Holy Theotokos, written by St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite. It is chanted during the daily Vespers.

Thessaloniki. Located in northern Greece, Thessaloniki is the second largest city in Greece and considered the administrative and ecclesiastical centre of Macedonia and Thrace.

Typikon pl. typika. (1) A brotherhood's system of rules regulating the organization and life of the monk(s), usually established by its founder; (2) the set of rubrics governing the order of liturgical services.

Uncreated Light. The Light of the Transfiguration of Christ as revealed to His disciples in Mount Tabor. As the Elder said "you can see it with your eyes closed and with your eyes open, at night in the darkness and during the

day in the sunlight." After ascetic purification and devotion of the soul, a person is able, by God's grace, to experience a divine union and be immersed in, and radiate, this Light. This experience is referred to as theoria (a true spiritual knowledge of God, a visible Presence of Him) and was expressed systematically by St. Gregory Palamas in the fourteenth century.

Vatopedi Monastery. The second ranking of the twenty monasteries on the Holy Mountain. Founded in AD 980, Vatopedi is one of the most impressive Athonite monasteries. The view from the sea reminds one of a small, fortified citadel of the Middle Ages. It is considered to be one of the richest monasteries on Mount Athos in terms of Holy Relics of the Saints and miraculous icons of the All Holy Theotokos.

vigil (Gk. *agrypnia*). Divine services and prayer lasting throughout the night preceding the feast day of a saint or another major feast.

Xenofontos. Located on the west side this monastery is the sixteenth of twenty. The catholicon (main church) is dedicated to Saint George and is the largest on Mount Athos, able to accommodate during liturgy two thousand people.

zealots. The term used on Mount Athos to describe monks who refuse to commemorate the Patriarch of Constantinople on account of the Patriarchate's 1924 change from the "old" Julian calendar to the Gregorian-based "new" calendar. Regarding the question of division over the calendar change in the Church of Greece, see the "Old Calendarist" entry in the Glossary as well as Second Part Chapter 3 "Mother Church" page 665.

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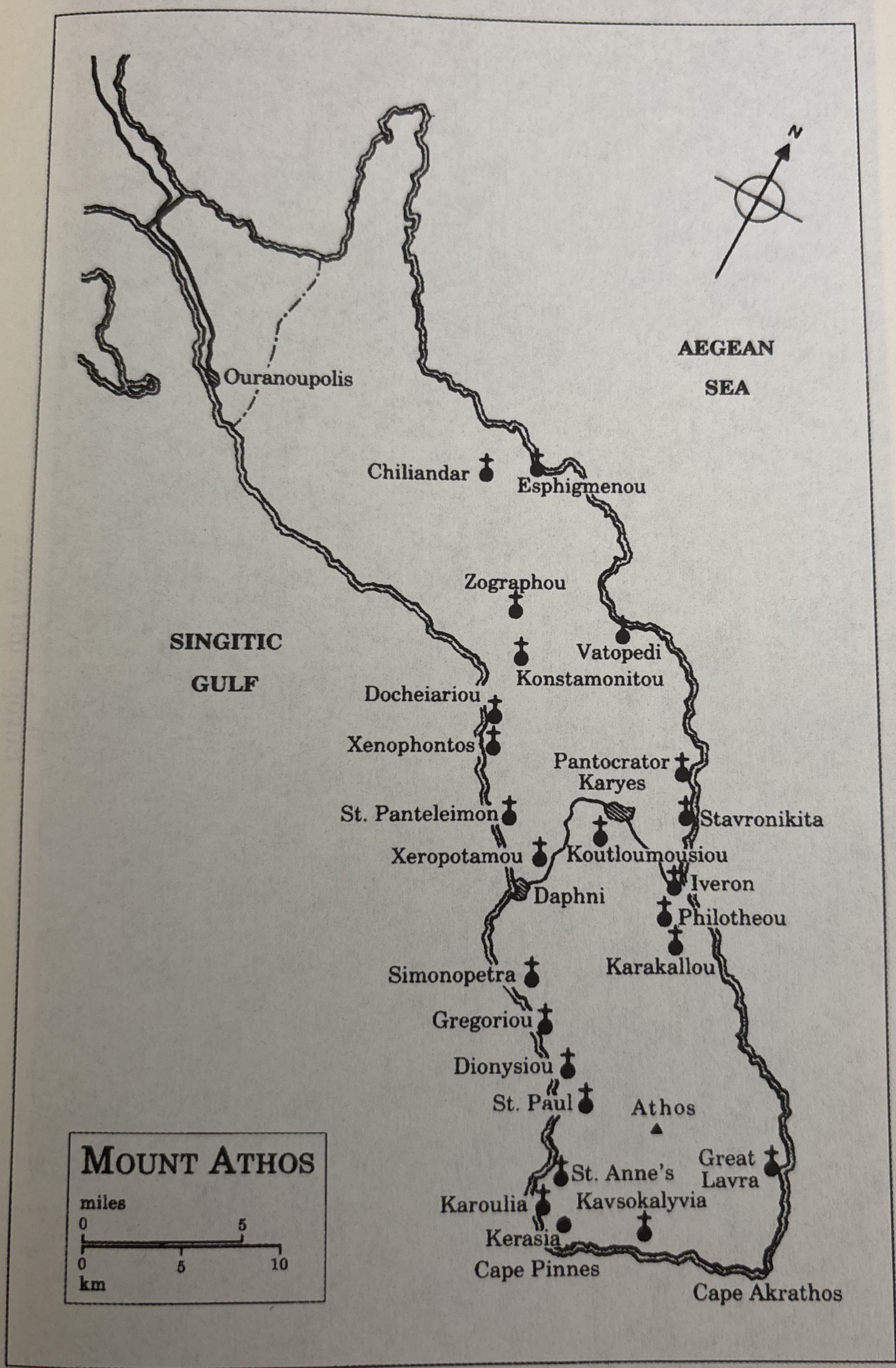
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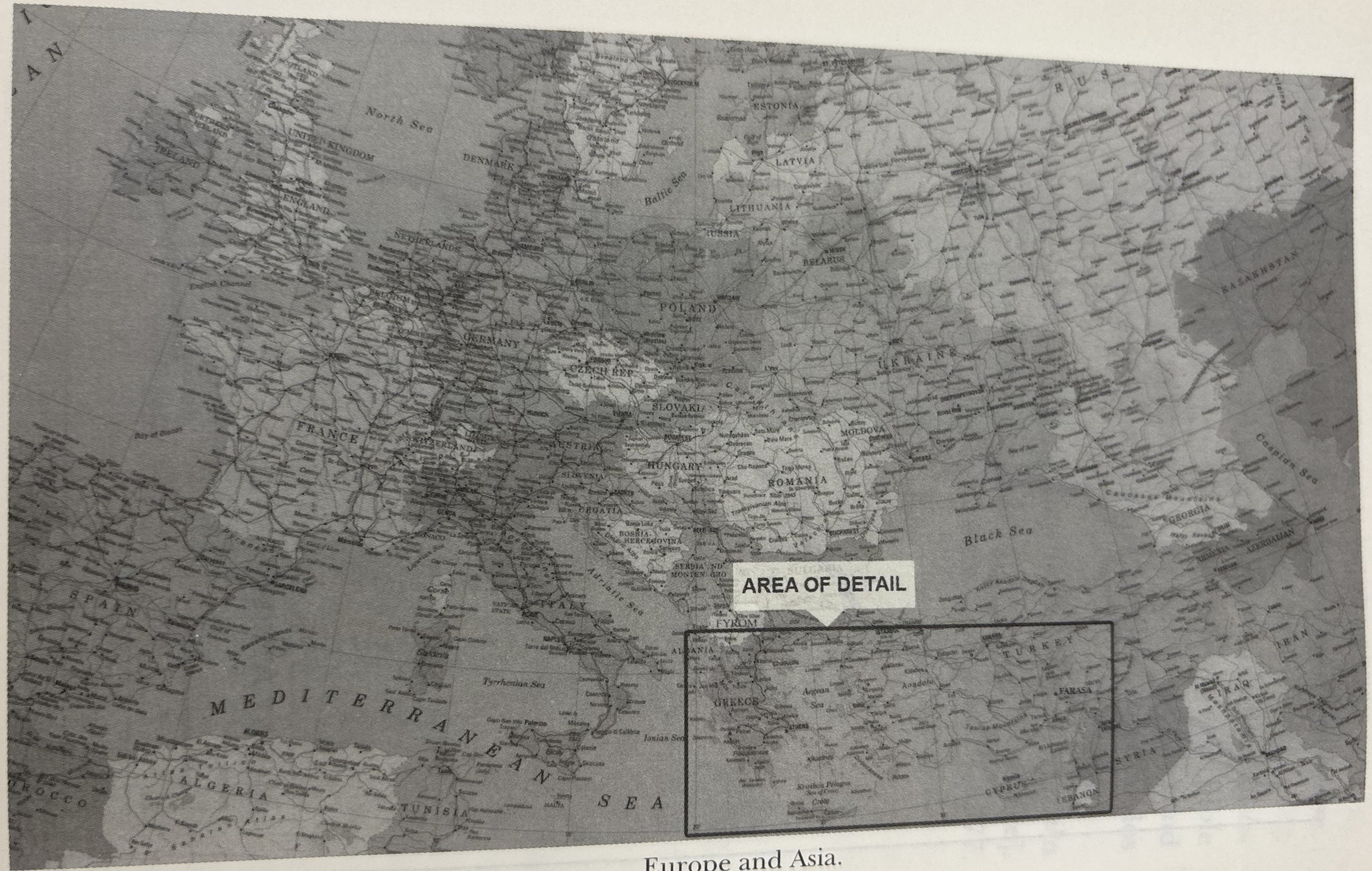
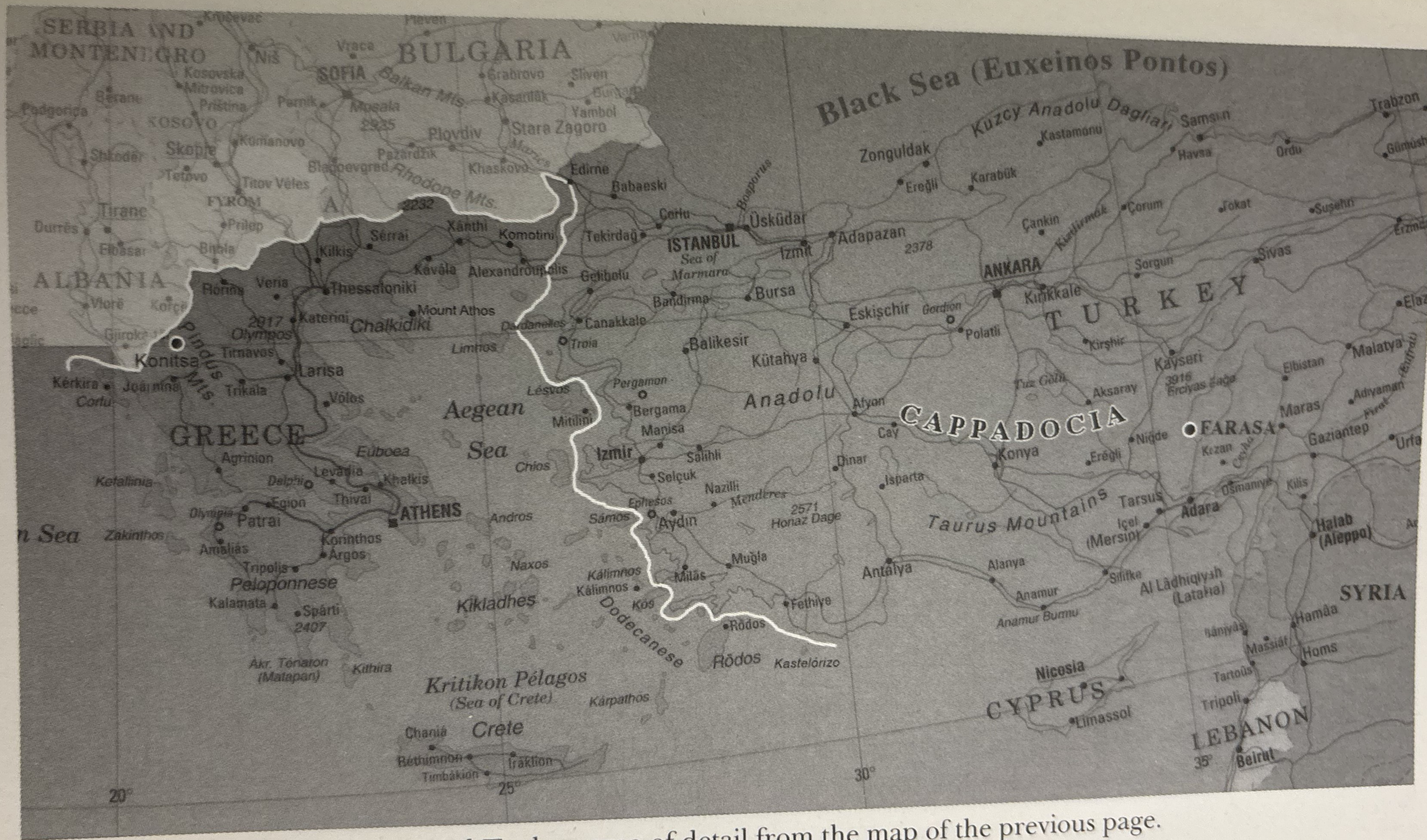


Europe and Asia.



Greece and Turkey, area of detail from the map of the previous page.